



St. Luke's Life of Jesus

BY G. AIKEN TAYLOR

A Sober Faith

St. Luke's Life of Jesus

RETOLD IN MODERN LANGUAGE

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by G. Aiken Taylor

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To Manford Geo. Gutzke

In whose classroom the pages of the
New Testament for me first came to life.

That the Great Angel-blinding light should shrink
His blaze, to shine in a poor Shepherd's eye;
That the unmeasur'd God so low should sinke,
As Pris'ner in a few poor rags to lye,
That from his Mother's Breast he milke should drinke,
Who feeds with Nectar Heaven's faire family,
That a vile Manger his low Bed should prove,
Who in a Throne of stars Thunders above;
That He whom the Sun serves, should faintly peepe
Through clouds of Infant Flesh! That He, the old
Eternall Word should be a Child, and weepe;
That He who made the fire, should feare the cold,
That Heaven's high Majesty His Court should keepe
In a clay cottage, by each blast control'd;
That Glories self should serve our Grievs and feares,
And free Eternity submit to years,
Let our overwhelming wonder be.

—CRASHAW

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St. Luke's Life of Jesus

I

Just a Moment, Please?

I am perfectly aware that this is no way to begin a story. You do not hold a reader by writing about what you intend to say before you say it. And you cannot create suspense by starting at the end of your story and telling how everything turned out.

But in this instance it is necessary—indeed you *must* know what the following pages will contain to grasp their curious significance. And I have concluded, after many false starts, that there is no other way to do it than to tell you what you are about to read.

The outcome of this story holds few readers in suspense. Virtually every person reading these words knows how it turned out, indeed knows most of the details by heart. The outcome of this story (and here may lie something really significant) did not even hold its first readers in suspense, many years ago. They, too, knew how it turned out. It was written to them, as it is now repeated to you, for a purpose other than that of acquainting them with something about which they had never heard.

If this were primarily a biography of Jesus Christ, it would begin at the beginning and tell everything possible of His life. It would be, then, a detailed and comprehensive record

of His movements and of His ministry. But I cannot write such a biography, although others who have tried to communicate the warmth of His personality or make His Way a reality in human experience have followed this method. I cannot because the inspired men who gave us the original, priceless record did not.

The essential facts of the matter, it would seem, are these: Two thousand years ago (or thereabouts) an Event took place which was not a simple occurrence, but a complex series of advents and incidents, providing for all time the key to ultimate Reality both in this world and in the next. A small band of irrelevant people were inexplicably privileged to be the first to receive the benefits of this Event. Then, as they went their way throughout the ancient world, a great many others became profoundly and permanently affected.

Some time later, for their own use and for the benefit of future generations, the essential parts of this Event were recorded in four "Gospels" and a book called "The Acts." Now upon these careful documents, the tradition known as Christian has based its understanding of the Supreme Being and of the grounds and nature of His dealings with men. Four of the five documents have been generally assumed to be biographies of a Person. The fifth, it would seem, is a historical extension of one of the biographies.

But the hungry reader, looking for fine pictorial sketches and intimate personal glimpses of this One who forever holds the center of the world's historical stage, becomes disappointed. The four who wrote of Him for posterity seem to be strangely unpreoccupied with the ordinary rules of effective biography. To succeeding generations they bequeathed fragmentary and amazingly unorganized accounts that ever since have baffled millions of eager readers with their lack of

literary color and shadow. Selective almost to an extreme, utterly silent within areas one would expect any biographer to consider important, these men who were inscrutably guided to convey the significance of history's most important years tease, so to speak, our frantic passion for knowledge with mystery, trivia, silence and seeming incoherence. For only one or two episodes within their whole account stand forth fully described and explained.

Two of the biographers did not even think it necessary to mention the fact that He of whom they wrote was born. None bothered to report more than an incident or two from the first thirty long years of His life. One who was as close as any to Him throughout His short public ministry, devoted more than half of his crisp narrative to less than a week of it: the last. Yet all four, writing books of Good News, painfully preoccupied themselves with the dreadful details of the final episode of His public life, with the violent arrest, the farcical trial, the personal indignities, torture, and death.

Undoubtedly, profound significance must lie somewhere in all this. But beyond that conclusion few commentators are in agreement. Earnest followers of the Way (as Luke called it), seeking to isolate the secret of its effectiveness, have mistakenly assumed that the factors of greatest importance must be the example and teaching of that One who died, the supreme embodiment of a way of life He came to portray. Believing that the effectiveness of the Way depends upon how well we learn to appreciate the elusive qualities of the personality of Jesus and the rich implications of His teachings, many have dedicated their total religious interest to recapturing the flavor of those qualities and the basic content of those teachings.

Consequently, the Christian world has occasionally

wandered in cold, ethical labyrinths very slightly removed from the bare moral systems of other religions of the world, while the breathtaking Power of the Way was lost among shadows of misunderstanding and doubt. Too often men and women have sought peace, yea pursued it, but not found it because the purpose of these writings about Jesus was misunderstood and the center of spiritual attention misplaced. Because the central purpose of the four dedicated authors has so often been missed in the search after Reality and Power, that search has too often proved fruitless.

Yet how can it be otherwise so long as religious folk turn for their piety to narratives never intended to be the basis for piety at all?

The following is the story of Jesus Christ. In some ways it may look much like other existing efforts to reconstruct the gossamer fabric of an elusive period in the history of a hot and arid little corner of the world.

But this story is different in one crucial respect. It represents an effort to establish the *purpose* four men had in mind when they wrote their stories twenty centuries ago. It is an attempt to isolate and describe the center of spiritual attention; to recover the Way to Reality and Power. The Event which occupies the center of the original account (not the closing scene) provides a key to something vital and necessary to successful human living.

This is a quest for that key.

I believe the quest will be successful only if we begin by trying to understand what the men who first told us of Jesus Christ *wanted* to express through their accounts. For I am not at all sure they wanted us to take the bare ethics within their writings for the key itself.

Take Luke, for instance, whose writings it is my purpose here to reproduce. His account is a good one to take because (among other reasons) it is the most extensive. Unlike Mark and John, Luke remembers to mention the fact that Jesus was born. And unlike Mark, John, and also Matthew, he continues his narrative beyond the time of preparation into the period of fulfillment and Power. Thus his story is the most nearly complete of the four. But that does not mean that it differs in any degree from the others in the essential message he wished to convey.

In my mind's eye I see Luke writing to recapture something in danger of being lost in a time when the Way itself was being found by increasing numbers every day. I see him anxious to rescue a Person from Time's relentless work to make Him a wraith. I see him writing to separate fact from doting and well-meaning, but unwise fiction. I see him arguing that Eternity in truth invaded time; that Heaven did not simply deceive earth into believing It came. I see him eager to relate the later time in which he was writing to the ancient hope of his people and to the Event which had climaxed their hope; that is, to relate the fulfillment now a matter of history to the promise long ago made.

Luke's *Life of Christ* sought to strengthen faith by giving it information beyond its minimum needs: to inform faith of its heritage, not to provide it with its fundamental constitution. He addressed himself to fellow travelers upon the Way (as he called it), not to prospective converts.

To men and women who had received Power after their commitment, he now introduced more fully the Person from whom It came. To men and women already transfigured by contact with Reality, he wrote to explain what made it

all possible. To all who were hungering to know, he (and others who wrote like him) supplied the record to fill the gap till then occupied only by a comma in a familiar creed: ". . . born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate . . ."

Hence Luke's account is important not as a biography but as the portrait of a staggering Event. In the final analysis, he does not give a set of principles, but the story of a fulfilled promise. Here is a Person introduced to us not as a figure to imitate, but as the foundation of confidence, the basis of hope. To a living Program, Luke has added its vital preface.

In the pages that follow, I offer the story I think Luke told. Taken from his writings only, it is a modern version of what I believe he wanted to convey through his story of Jesus Christ. It is written as I believe he would have written it, had he had today's false premises in mind as well as those of the first century. It is brief because Luke's account is brief. It is simple because Luke wrote simply. It is systematic only in the manner I believe Luke intended to be systematic: in the faithful portrayal of a cross-section of the Lord's ministry and purpose.

Unlike many accounts, it does not center the Christian hope in anything finished before the Cross; nor does it locate Calvary at the end of the story, but in the historical middle. These things I reveal in advance, that the story may be understood and that my purpose may be clear: to find Religion in an available Presence rather than in an example however holy, or in teachings however profound, or in principles however lofty.

Mine is not primarily the story of what Jesus said and

did, but of what Luke intended to say about what Jesus said and did. Hence it is about the religion Luke wished to convey. If the two are synonymous, then Luke's account is a true account. And if this portrayal covers both, then it is true both to Luke and to our Lord Jesus Christ.

II

The Prelude

Dear Theophilus:

Since many other persons have already attempted to outline in an orderly account all those things we firmly believe (by which I mean those things related to us by the many who were eyewitnesses of the events and who later became ministers of the Way), I, too, because I have perfectly understood everything from the very beginning, have decided that it might be worth while to write you in order, most excellent Theophilus, that you may accept with assurance the things you have been taught.

Now the rather unusual circumstances surrounding the birth of our Lord really begin with certain out-of-the-ordinary happenings in the life of an old priest named Zacharias and his equally old wife, Elizabeth. It was in their lives that the signs first appeared telling of tremendous things about to happen. To them God first gave notice that He was about to set off the chain of events which culminated, as you know, in the gift of the Presence, making religion personal.

Zacharias and Elizabeth were of the lineage of Aaron, just ordinary people living in Jerusalem during the reign of Herod the Great. The fact of significance here is that they had always been childless. And not only so, they both were

well past the age when their union could be expected to produce children.

Now Zacharias belonged, within the temple organization of priests, to the course of Abia. This meant that, periodically, he was assigned to conduct the morning devotional rites. These rites came to an end when the officiating priest vanished within the Holy Place to offer the morning incense upon the golden altar and then reappeared to dismiss the waiting congregation with the age-old Aaronic blessing.

One day when Zacharias had entered the Holy Place to offer the incense, something happened which constitutes the beginning of my story. For inside the temple he suddenly found that he was not alone. And no man was waiting for him there, but an angel: a being from another world.

The angel, with one hand resting upon the golden altar, told the frightened priest that he had a message for him. Reassuringly, he said what he had been sent to say. But the message only increased Zacharias' distress, for the angel promised the old man and his wife—a child. These two, who long years before had given up hope of ever having a family, would in due time have a son.

Moreover, according to the heavenly visitor, the promised boy would be no ordinary child. Zacharias heard that he would have a key role in a coming program of redemption, that his birth would herald a new era for all men everywhere.

Now every pious Jew firmly believed that the awaited Messiah would not come until the prophet Elijah first returned to earth after four hundred years, to announce His coming and prepare His people to receive their king. Zacharias' son, if he could believe it, would be the expected forerunner of the Christ of the Almighty, preaching in the spirit and power of Elijah.

But Zacharias could not believe it. He heard that the power of God would be upon the infant even before birth, that he must name him John and rear him in strict compliance with the ascetic laws governing Nazarites. But he could only twist one hand in the other in disbelief and stare doubtfully at the testimony of his senses.

He protested that this could not be. His protests were met—with a miracle. Zacharias would not leave the temple this day thinking his experience only a hallucination. Did he disbelieve the testimony of his eyes and ears? Did he think, in the face of a divine promise so dramatically given, that things impossible with men were beyond the power of God to accomplish? After talking face to face with one who announced that he had come across the border line separating the substantial world from the intangible, did he yet doubt that decrepit flesh could be made to bring forth life: that a child would be born? Then he would have a sign to make him believe: a simple demonstration of the sovereign energy about to be released in more wonderful signs than this. Because he disbelieved, he would not speak again until after the angel's promise had been fulfilled.

Dazed with shock, Zacharias stood long by the golden altar after his visitor had vanished. Then he turned and made his way to the great open doorway beyond which the multitude impatiently fretted at the unusual delay in the morning ritual. At the edge of the marble porch Zacharias raised his hands in the customary gesture of benediction; but no words came from his lips. Mute, the priest finally touched his lips helplessly and gestured vaguely towards the open doorway behind him. Instantly the multitude came to life:

"He has seen a vision!"

Zacharias had seen more than an intangible vision. As

quickly as he could be relieved from his post, he stumbled home, later to witness with awe the incredible fulfillment of the angel's promise. True to the prediction, Zacharias remained speechless until his child was born. Then, when they asked him to name the boy, he called for a writing tablet and, over the protests of some who thought that an only child should bear a family name, he wrote, "His name is John." And, as suddenly as it had come, his impediment left him in a burst of praise and thanksgiving that precipitated talk among the villagers for miles around. For these things were not done secretly, Theophilus, nor were they known only to a few privileged folk.

So the story begins. With the public invasion of the supernatural into the simple life of a childless couple, Eternity's greatest and most meaningful intrusion into Time began. For this John indeed spoke the first Word of the Revelation that Power greater than man and mighty enough to meet man's need was offered by Heaven to whosoever would receive it.

A little more than six months after Zacharias' experience in the temple, a similar but much more significant visitation occurred in the small city of Nazareth, within the province of Galilee, some sixty miles to the north of Jerusalem. This time the angel appeared to a maiden, a young woman engaged to be married to a carpenter named Joseph.

From his opening salutation to his words of farewell the heavenly visitor filled his message with extraordinary promises of mysteries beyond the power of the wildest imagination to conceive.

"Hail! Favored among women!" the angel began. "The Lord is with you." Then, calming her terror, he spoke to Mary quietly of unspeakable things, pulling aside for her, as

he had done for Zacharias, the curtain of the future to let her have a glimpse of more than she could then comprehend.

The unmeasured Word of Creation was coming to talk with shepherds and fishermen on Galilean hillsides and shores. The light that blinded a wandering people in the desert when reflected off Sinai in the face of Moses was about to shrink to a flicker of tiny life in the breast of a baby. Heaven's throne was about to remove and become a wooden manger, while He who sits upon it would shortly know the hungry and cold life of a servant.

Heaven's high Majesty was coming to serve man's grief and fears; to enter His claim to eternal dominion over the hearts of His own—and He was coming through her, Mary.

The announcement of the angel was as clear as it was unprecedented. She, unknown by man, would bear this Child. She would call his name, Jesus.

To Mary's whispered question, her visitor replied that forces from heaven itself would work within her the miracle of the Incarnation: that the Spirit of God would touch her, the power of the Almighty would overshadow her. For the holy Child, born of her, would be the Son of God.

As though deliberately to offer this girl a point of contact between the high world of mystery from which he had come and her own little world which had suddenly become only as real as her faith would make it, the angel told her, before he vanished, of the visitation to her cousin Elizabeth whose time was now not far away. Then he left her to her thoughts.

Deeper into the sacred mystery we cannot probe. But that these early and vital actors in heaven's great drama were not entirely unaware of the significance of their roles, I think you can easily see. They knew, however dimly, that they had become a part of something of cosmic importance.

After the angel's visit, Mary lost no time getting up to the hill country of Judea to see her cousin Elizabeth. She fled there, to be near the one person who would have some idea, however slight, of what she must carry in her thoughts and upon her heart the rest of her life.

Now the preceding months had not been very easy for Elizabeth, though her fulfilled dreams could hardly have shattered her composure beyond bearing. But Mary's tight little world had turned into a holy and high-walled enclosure of mystery and suspense, a world colored by strange and beautiful exhilarations but also thrust through with loneliness and unbearable distractions. In the home of Elizabeth, a fresh, exciting breath of heavenly influence swept over the two women, finally to bring serenity of spirit to both. To be sure, when Elizabeth greeted her cousin, she was not prepared for the wrenching leap of excitement in her womb or the involuntary gasp which escaped her lips. And words she did not intend to say welled up out of control in her throat while wonder lighted her eyes at the sight of her younger cousin:

"The mother of my Lord!"

But for Mary the song of Elizabeth quieted, at last, the turmoil raging within her breast, bringing, if not understanding, at least a more serene composure to fulfill the holy resignation with which she first had acknowledged the angel's message. Like a softer echo called forth by a shout, her voice answered Elizabeth's, almost involuntarily and with increasing passion, uttering the beautiful cadences of her Magnificat:

"My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced
in God my Savior.

For He hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden:
For, behold, from henceforth

All generations shall call me blessed.
For He that is Mighty hath done to me great things;
And Holy is His name.
And His mercy is on them that fear Him, from generation to generation."

This was the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In the fullness of time, as the wind which passes from East to West is felt but not seen, supernatural forces caught up two humble, Jewish families in whirlwinds of emotion and put them down never again to be the same. For now the curtain was pulled all the way back, and the stage set for history's most inscrutable and poignant drama. The wonder these simple people felt at their unearthly privilege was only a foretaste of wonders to come, presaging greater things even than the birth of a child to a woman who knew not a man. Some thirty years later, the drama would be ended but not closed, when the Program freely began to offer its Power to any who would hear and accept.

Now Jesus was not born in Nazareth, where Mary and Joseph lived. He was born in Bethlehem, just as the ancient writings had predicted. Some time before, in the days when Quirinius held the post of Roman governor over your Syria, Caesar Augustus had decided to take a thorough, empire-wide population census. By the time official wheels ground toward Palestine, and the decree finally was put into effect in Judea, Mary's time had almost come upon her. The terms of the imperial command required each family to register in person in the province and city from which the family traced its lineage. For both Mary and Joseph that meant Bethlehem, the storied city of David.

No exceptions to the decree could be made. Despite her

condition, Mary was forced to follow Joseph sixty weary miles to the south. All roads were choked with travelers bent on similar missions. And, as they might have expected, when the young couple arrived in Bethlehem every available accommodation had been taken. Weary, desperate, and with Mary in pain, they took the only refuge they could find: the earthy stable adjoining the only village inn. There they were, vying with patient asses and grunting camels for space on the straw-littered earth, when Mary's Child was born.

Gently, wondering how their discomfort and humiliation could be consistent with their heavenly vision, they wrapped the Baby in swaddling clothes and laid Him in a stable manger.

But if His guardians felt a touch of disappointment that historic night, it was short-lived. They had not been forgotten. And no longer would the rest of the world have to wait to share their knowledge that the Messiah of God had come. Privileged groups and pious persons here and there came to worship, brought gifts to honor, found occasion to touch Him with reverence and always to reassure Mary and Joseph by their homage that unearthly forces were spreading their work and bringing about Eternity's will in Eternity's own good time and way.

The first, beyond the stable, to welcome the Child were probably the least expected but perhaps the most representative among those who came to pay their homage to Him: for to be the Shepherd of souls He came, and to Judean shepherds occurred the first heaven-sent disclosure of His advent.

No longer in quiet visitations but now in blazing light and ringing paeans of praise came the announcement of Eternity's Incarnation. Out on the rolling Judean hills a group of shepherds were sleeping the night out when a

sudden blaze of blinding light and rolling thunder crashed down upon the peaceful calm of the night. From the very sky overhead they were galvanized by a voice which told them of the Baby near by in the city of David who was both Christ and Lord. They would not find Him in a rich man's mansion, but in the inn's stable and the stable's manger—wrapped in swaddling bands.

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men of good will!"

The shepherds listened, they understood and, that very night, they went, to crowd the animals out of the way and worship the Baby. When they found Him, their homage was the first accorded to Him by any but His parents.

Now, in addition to the shepherds, other persons here and there shared in Heaven's disclosure that Eternity had become Flesh in Time. During the next few days several greeted the Child with the same respectful and reverent acts of recognition that the shepherds had shown, His identity revealed to them by a higher source than that which supplies ordinary information to men. Among these were Simeon, an aged and devout inhabitant of Jerusalem who awaited patiently the expected dawn of fulfillment (for he trusted that he would not die until he had seen with his own eyes the Lord's Christ); and Anna, a devout woman over eighty years a widow, upon whom the Spirit of the Lord was known to come.

These saw Him when Mary and Joseph took Him the few short miles to Jerusalem to offer the prescribed sacrifice for her purification. While they were there, God added these two aged saints to the circle of the privileged ones, meanwhile using Simeon to keep alive the fires of faith and trust first lighted in Mary by the angel's visit.

"The Salvation of God!" Simeon called the Child when

he came upon the little family waiting patiently in the temple courtyard with their two pigeons, the offering of the poor. And taking Him in his arms, he spoke a patriarchal blessing, offering thanks to God for having been permitted to see the Messiah:

"Thanks be to Thee, O God! For the salvation which Thou hast prepared for all peoples to see: Thy light, to illumine the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel!"

But Simeon had more to say than the praise he offered to the Child. The gift of recognition which he had received had been accompanied by an insight into the dark future. He spoke to Mary and Joseph of a coming mission of redemption and hinted sadly of danger and of opposition and death, concluding cryptically, of Mary:

"Yes, and a sword will pierce your soul also!"

At that moment Anna joined the little group. She, like Simeon, seemed to need no introduction. Glad joy mingled with recognition shone from her face, for she, too, somehow knew that this Child represented the fulfillment of ancient promises made to her people. She did not keep the secret to herself, either, but shared it with all in Jerusalem who piously put their religious trust in the expected Christ.

So you see, Theophilus, these things did not occur in a corner, nor in such a way as to pass unnoticed. The divine plan unfolded with the knowledge (imperfect, of course, and uncomprehending) of those who had a part in it that something out of the ordinary was taking place. The One who later called disciples to Himself, who broke down the wall between man and God and the barriers between man and man, was not exalted on the basis of His adult accomplishments. This was not One who in later life saw Himself fulfilling prophetic sayings and thereby decided to play the role

of Messiah to the hilt. Neither was He accredited only by later revelations and Power. By no means. Heaven took the initiative before He was born, filling the earth with supernatural events and clear disclosures that the fullness of time had come. These continued well-nigh until He was grown.

Take, for instance, what happened a dozen years later. At the age of twelve, according to custom, the boy Jesus would become a full-fledged "son of the law." His parents, for whom the careful observance of the law had taken on a new meaning, each year went up to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover. This year they took Him along for the full week of the feast.

At the conclusion of the festivities and worship, the caravan from Galilee promptly left Jerusalem. It left with Mary and Joseph trusting that Jesus, from whom they had been separated in the rush of the departure, traveled with friends elsewhere in the caravan. But when they looked for Him as the caravan made preparation for the first night on the road, He was nowhere to be found. Frightened as any parents would be, they hurried back to Jerusalem. For three days they searched frantically before they turned to the one most logical place where He might have gone: the temple itself. There they found Him, not loitering in childish fascination, not wandering about in idle curiosity, but seated in the center of an astonished circle of proud Doctors of the law. No unwelcome intruder He, the boy of twelve had won their openmouthed respect with questions and answers that revealed a more than mature understanding and insight.

To His mother's troubled reproach for the anxiety they had suffered, and their feeling that He had used them badly, He answered simply:

"Didn't you know that some day I would be about my Father's business?"

But He returned with them to Nazareth and to a life of dutiful obedience, a life from which His parents thereafter felt strangely excluded. And the years that followed swiftly grew more and more mysterious and perplexing to Mary and Joseph; for, as His time approached, they more than ever found that life with their Son claimed their faith, but offered little, in return, by way of explanation.

Thus, Theophilus, the Lord came: no stranger, not secretly, but with His credentials openly in His hand and unmistakable from the very beginning. As a matter of fact, they knew He would be Someone special before the beginning as men count time. Wherever God's invasion of Time through the miracle of the Incarnation touched the human sphere, those who stood at the points of contact knew they had been touched. We say this because among us today live those who felt it. Make no mistake: no mere man walked Galilee's rolling hills and died on Judea's barren Place of the Skull. He who did so bore in Himself that radiance the pale reflection of which shines from each human heart lately brought to life by a Power greater than itself.

By verified heavenly visitations, by signs that signified divine Power at work, by a history that fulfilled, at every step, the prophetic words long before uttered; by the personal testimony of too many witnesses for it to have been a mistake, we trace our present privilege through Calvary, back through Galilee and Bethlehem to Nazareth and Jerusalem: wherever God, according to the inscrutable counsel of His own will, mercifully volunteered to make Himself known.

III

The Beginning

For nearly four hundred years, the voice of prophecy had been silent. Think of it! Four hundred years since the last spiritual ambassador had brought a "Thus saith the Lord!" to the sons and daughters of Abraham. The tree of Israel had grown wild for lack of pruning, weak from the inroads of spiritual decay and cluttered with the dead branches of corrupted religiosity. Here and there devout patriarchs pored over the scrolls of the prophets, the traditions of the elders and the works of the revered commentators, muttering that the time was ripe for the Messiah.

While out in the wilderness, living in lonely solitude, waiting for the Call he knew some day would come, was the man who would break the long prophetic silence. And in the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar, John, the son of Zacharias and Elizabeth, thereafter known as the Baptizer, received his Call. Then, obedient to the urgency of his divine commission, John left the tempering solitude of the barren wastes that had been his recent home and launched the brief career to which he had been set apart even before birth.

His office was that of prophet: a stinger of consciences, a prompter of duty, a preacher of repentance, a critic and

counselor. And his office was especially that of herald: to announce, and introduce to His people, the Messiah.

The Lord came humbly unto His own, but He did not sneak into their midst. However unclear the ultimate significance of His purpose may have been, He did not conceal it from all save a favored few whom He secretly gathered about Him. On the contrary. The one man recognized by the nation as worthy to speak for the Almighty pointed Him out for all who cared to see or heed. Publicly heralded, plainly accredited and visibly anointed with a divine Unction, He came.

If His own received Him not, it was for reasons other than that they had not heard He was here. Perhaps they snubbed Him because He did not truckle to the superiority of wealth or pay homage to military power and the cause of Jewish nationalism. Despite the unmistakable quality of His introduction, few were attracted by His meekness of demeanor, His quietness of speech and His impatience with ostentation, and they were of humble stock.

But John had been prepared especially to prepare the way for His appearing, to make Him known when He came, and to act as agent in the divine Ordination which solemnly would launch His ministry. Like a brilliant shooting star, the Baptizer flashed upon the Judean scene and was gone, leaving behind Jesus, the Christ Anointed.

John's preaching primarily demanded ethical and moral reconstruction. His was a fit concern to precede the life and death of One who would provide helpless man with the means for ethical and moral excellence.

"Repent! For the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!"

The Baptizer preached judgment in slashing indictments that wiped away distinctions within class, station, and piety.

Whether mighty or lowborn, washed or unwashed, legal purist or pagan Roman mercenary, all felt the cutting sting of his tongue. Under his preaching the proud were brought low, the satisfied left unsettled—but most sincere hearts began to be vaguely stirred by longing for they knew not what. The consciences of the people were seared as they had not been since the days when the inspired prophets of old had stalked their accusing way through the land.

Men and women who indicated they wished to identify themselves with his demand for moral reform, John enlisted by baptism—the ancient Jewish pledge of identification and dedication. Thousands acknowledged their part in the sins of their generation by coming forward thus to make their confession of guilt. In their submission to this prophet, they also indicated their concern to renew the eternally hopeless struggle to obey the ancient Mosaic precept: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy strength—and thy neighbor as thyself."

Thus the Baptizer stirred the slumbering spiritual hunger, before the Lord came to provide the means whereby for all time that hunger might be satisfied. Bold, provocative, and accusing, John placed his finger on the spiritual heart of the nation and pronounced it diseased. Then he introduced the Physician who would make it whole. At every level of the social scale, from Herod himself to the Roman mercenaries and the puppet revenue collectors, he pointed his warning finger of judgment. His generation he called a generation of vipers, and he warned them all—especially the proud Doctors—that no mechanical, racial, or ecclesiastical succession could ever guarantee their acceptance before God.

It was inevitable that the searching demands of John's courageous preaching should collide with the entrenched

depravity which generally occupied both the political and the ecclesiastical high places of his day. Rumbings of defiance began to mingle with the murmur of hundreds praying for forgiveness. And when the Baptizer reached into the royal palace to rebuke Herod himself for immoral conduct, his career came abruptly to an end. The Tetrarch added to the number of his crimes this: that he shut up John in prison.

Now at the height of John's ministry, Jesus (who had joined the crowds at Jordan's edge and placed Himself among those identified with the revival movement) was revealed to the people. John baptized Him at His request, whereupon Heaven offered another of its acts of accreditation, this time accompanied by Power: visibly to invest and ordain, divinely to anoint and internally to empower with the fullness of His Messiahship. The Presence, which centuries before had awed a watching people with the descending pillar of fire, now came in a bodily shape similar to that of a dove upon Him, while a voice which all who stood by heard, announced from Heaven:

"Thou art my beloved Son; in Thee I am well pleased!"

For John, that sacred moment brought final vindication to a devoted ministry based largely, till then, on faith. He had not known who his successor would be. He had, it is true, been dimly aware that he would be instrumental in introducing a new era in the history of God's relations with men. But even he, the preacher of righteousness, never fully realized the portent of his own commission. Not until after he languished in prison, awaiting death, while the Lord drew huge crowds, did John begin to understand something of the true meaning of the divine drama in which he had played a part. And then his perplexed mind was set at ease only

after he had sent for and had received a direct interpretation from the Lord Himself.

Publicly revealed, fully accredited and filled with Power, Jesus now stood on the threshold of his earthly career. He, the supposed son of Joseph, was now about thirty years of age.

But He still was not ready. Now a period of testing and trial awaited Him. Somehow the Plan ordained that He come to know the meaning of loneliness, suffer a foretaste of hunger and a savage experience of temptation.

As He went alone to meet His trial, so must He remain alone in an understanding of what it signified. For we cannot follow Him there, except at a great distance. We can only stand on the outside of that wilderness looking in, only believe that the experience somehow better fitted Him to carry out His mission.

Led by the Presence, Jesus went into the near-by wilderness. After forty days of loneliness, without food, the Tempter came. What followed were especially adapted to the unique dignity of His person, but were nevertheless typical of every trial which ever conquered susceptible mankind. Virtually all capitulations by tempted children of Eve result from personal well-being, possessions, or pride. To each of these desires, as they might have appeared in our Lord, the Tempter made his appeal.

The first approach was to His physical needs. Insidiously the seemingly innocent reminder came that His enforced fast could be broken with but a word of protest. Was He not divine? Could He not reasonably rebel against this trial of His human appetites by materializing for Himself the food that He needed? He was tempted to change a stone into bread. Such use of the Power within Him would have been

much less spectacular than many of the miracles to come.

But here the issue went deeper than mere willingness to obey the voice of the Tempter or put His power casually to use. It asked Him to place the ultimate within Him at the disposal of the temporal: to make the divine the servant of the human. But His spirit conquered the inclination to change the true order of values at the whim of human desire:

“Man does not live by bread alone, but by the Word of God!”

More difficult to understand is the object of the second invasion of His privacy. It is possible to believe that it happened, without comprehending how it could sorely have tried His purpose of redemption.

Yet to all men comes the temptation to exalt self above God and self's desires above God's will. This, in substance, was the second trial. It sought to introduce, as the object of supreme devotion, a lower and allegedly more rewarding allegiance: to fix, for the center of life, the glittering and tangible world of the flesh in place of the distant and demanding world of the spirit. It offered an easier and allegedly richer success to take the place of the hard and bitter struggle for that victory which would be His. It was the age-old offer of appeasement: evil's promise of surrender, if only good will compromise its goodness.

To the Lord came the temptation of unlimited success in His mission—if He would compromise His heavenly frame of reference. All men would surrender to His authority, if He in turn would relax just a little the high Holiness of the Purpose that guided Him along His narrow path of ultimate rejection. If He continued in the way of His present intention, at best but a small proportion of humanity would be won for His kingdom. On the other hand, a few concessions here and there (recognizing man for the creature he

is and catering somewhat to human vanity and the worldly mind) would bring universal approval. All men would turn to Him if He would set His sights somewhat lower, stop His campaign somewhat short of unconditional surrender, and modify a little the severity of His Testament.

But He resisted the evil: "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve!"

Once again the Tempter approached Him in his search for some point of weakness. This time the area under attack was the seat of self-respect: His pride. To the Lord came an inclination prompted by vanity: the use of His supernatural endowments for personal ends. He was tempted to display His breath-taking power to exalt His own importance; to accredit Himself with the spectacular; to put on an awesome display of power in the sight of the people, a death-defying stunt before the teeming crowds at the temple.

Lurking under the temptation was the age-old quibble of unbelief: If God is all-powerful, why doesn't He simply sweep away all obstacles with a word—why must there be Atonement and retribution? If He can do all things, why doesn't He make it His pleasure simply to wave His hand and cancel the sin, right the wrong, blot out the evil, straighten the crooked, and guarantee the future, with all men perfect and entire, lacking nothing—and dispense with the cost?

To which the Lord supplied the only possible answer of faith: "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."

And then, at last, it was over. Tempted at all points like as we, yet He withstood that portent of trials to come, entirely without sin. Thus, even before He walked the crowded ways, He had been promised, sent, acclaimed, anointed, accredited, and, finally, weighed and found not wanting.

IV

His Credentials

One so truly unique is not honored by acknowledgment of His superiority only as a pedagogue or a prophet: He was more. And you pay little homage to One who closed His mission with so triumphant a victory, by acknowledgment, however admiring, that He taught and preached the Kingdom of God: He did more.

He came to occupy the central place, not only within chronological history, but also within a cosmic invasion of Goodness into the den of Evil, with victory the object and a new era in personal religion the design. Everything He did must be viewed in the light of His true identity and evaluated in terms of that ultimate, cosmic design. Otherwise He becomes, at best, just another Heaven-accredited prophet. Or, if you please to deny Him that much, just another itinerant preacher and magician: a teacher of ethical and moral principles already deducible from the written heritage of His people. Improperly identified, He is just a peddler of spiritual wares common to most other ethical religions. Unless He is the Son of God He becomes, at last, only an expositor of intellectually discernible truth which is subject to the ordinary inquiries of skeptical philosophy: a great

reformer, perhaps, but one unfortunately cut off in the prime of life.

But ordinary human categories exhaust themselves describing Him. He was necessarily more than teacher or moralist or social savior. He necessarily cared for more than the creature needs of that hungry human sea which flowed across the hills of Galilee and Judea in his wake. His intentions reached even beyond the sense of that Law which He so clearly explained and that Will of God which He described so well to the discomfiture of the ecclesiastical demagogues of His day.

For He had come to die.

To be sure He went about doing good. It was not possible for the Creator to be heedless of His creation, for Justice to be unmerciful, or for Righteousness to be unethical. Across the length and breadth of Jewry men learned that Deity does not stand aloof from a believing cry for help. But He never went out of His way seeking an excuse to perform a miracle. The signs which drew the crowds, multiplying His friends and confounding His enemies, were no more than by-products (as it were) of His primary ministry to souls.

He carried His credentials, presenting them effectively upon sincere demand; but the credentials were never an end in themselves.

For His miracles occurred only to accredit Him before a people slow to believe and unwilling to follow a lowly Messiah. They confronted the astonished gaze of a sophisticated generation with substantial proof that He owned the right to be heard, and heeded. There was the time when the imprisoned Baptizer, perplexed by the turn of events (for he, too, had expected a spectacular deliverance for Israel from Rome and a return to the glory of former days), sent from

his prison to ask if he had wrongly identified this Lord as the historic Messiah. By way of reply, Jesus tactfully pointed to His credentials.

"Go tell John what you have seen and heard," He instructed the messengers, "how the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers become clean, the deaf hear, the dead rise, and the humble are offered mercy.

"Blessed are all they who see these signs, and believe!"

At no point was His ministry without such accreditation. Few people could say they did not know first hand of some instance when nature's law had bowed to His will. When He saw a need, He met it. But the way He met it! Sickness and physical deformity responded to just a touch or a word—and sometimes at a distance. Evil spirits consistently obeyed His command, often showing fright, but never refusing to obey. Even the finality of death itself broke under the power of His spoken word or the touch of His hand.

His unspeakable authority extended to the inanimate forces of nature: both wind and sea obeyed Him. And, having incredible power to control the substance of commonplace objects, He could begin with small fishes in his hands and provide enough food for thousands.

These things report we who saw them, that you may be confirmed in your faith.

He became known as quickly as He was, from one end of the land to the other, largely because of His miracles. Wherever His teachings were met with doubt or resistance, the divine power emanating, as it were, from His person quickly established His authority without question. To be sure, the disbelief He met did not always surrender, and opposition sometimes simply ran together and crystallized in spite of His credentials. But it was blind disbelief without a

case, and calculated opposition without an excuse. When, in the end, they took Him and killed Him for a little while, it was not for lack of evidence that He owned the authority to say what He did, but because of it.

In the synagogue at Capernaum, one Sabbath day, He released a demoniac from his slavery to the unclean spirit. It happened in those early days when the Lord was still relatively unknown. He had been teaching in the synagogue, interpreting the Scriptures with His own amazing clarity and insight, when this demoniac, a wild-looking man known to be taken with insane seizures, abruptly screamed aloud in the meeting:

"Let us alone! What have we done to Thee, Jesus of Nazareth? Hast Thou come to destroy us, O Holy One of God?"

While embarrassed neighbors rushed to seize the source of the disturbance and visiting ecclesiastical dignitaries rose haughtily in cold disapproval, Jesus faced the hysterical creature who babbled words beyond his ordinary understanding. He said quietly, but firmly:

"Hold your peace, and come out of him!"

Instantly the man doubled over as though seized with a convulsion, then collapsed, limp, onto the floor. There he lay, unhurt but very still, for minutes, before he seemed to recover consciousness. Then he climbed weakly to his feet, with a new, sane look in his eyes. He was cured.

The Sabbath congregation watching the little drama suddenly found its collective tongue:

"Who is this that commands unclean spirits and they come out?"

And His fame spread far and wide. So far, that in the palace of Herod, the one who occupied the throne heard of

Him and thought of John the Baptizer whom, by then, he had killed. And he trembled a little.

Another time He was guest in the house of Simon Peter when the apostle's mother-in-law lay sick with a fever. Because they begged Him to heal her, Jesus walked into the sick-room, stood over the bed, and spoke to the fever. The woman immediately got up well and came down to take up her household duties where she had left off.

Every sort of disease responded to His unique treatment, which consisted of a word, a touch, a command. When the people heard of it, they came in droves, bringing their afflicted ones. Walking, hobbling, dragging themselves, they frantically implored His aid—and He healed all who came believing.

The healing word or touch often evoked a convulsion as though Something resisted being wrenched from the afflicted body. Sometimes a cry tore from the sick lips before they became well: "Thou art the Christ, O Son of God!" Such ones He rebuked, forbidding them to take His name in vain. But in them we saw tangible evidence that man can be possessed by intelligent entities evil in character. Occasionally, it would seem, the universal sickness corroding men's souls may distill so finely that it becomes personal in its characteristics and intelligent in its personification. Then we saw the opposite extreme of one possessed by Godliness in the manner He came to accomplish. And when He challenged the evil spirit and put it to flight we had a foresight of personalities born anew and that gift of the Presence which since the Event has populated the Way.

A good example of the diabolical effects of total Evil-possession was seen in the young man from Gadara. But the story of this cure actually begins earlier, with one of

the Lord's more spectacular works: His calming of the sea of Galilee.

To escape the tedious journey by land, Jesus and His disciples sometimes sailed across the waters of the sea of Galilee when they wanted to travel from Capernaum, Tiberias, and the other west-coast cities, to the eastern shore—or vice versa. On this occasion, the crossing to the southeastern shore had been a rough one. A sudden, strong wind sweeping off the snowcapped mountains at the north had churned the lake into mountainous, deadly waves that threatened to swamp the small boat, crowded with the Lord and the Twelve. In great fright the men had awakened the Lord, who slept calmly in the stern. Showing in a look His disappointment at their fright, He had spoken a command to the mighty violence of His creation, and it had meekly obeyed. Even the Twelve, accustomed to His acts of healing, had watched speechless as the wind subsided and the water softened to a gentle lapping against the sides of the boat. No more spectacular work, while among us, demonstrated the magnitude of His power.

On the land the little party encountered a savage wild man. Stark naked, the creature hulked about the beach, showing a mild curiosity in the crowd which gave him a wide berth as it flocked to the point where the boat had been pulled up. This was one of his quieter days. When more violently seized, the man could not be restrained. Stronger than ten, he had overcome every effort to keep him bound and finally had been allowed to roam at will. Seldom seen, he lived in the caves of the near-by mountains and roamed the barren plateaus of that part of Galilee. Often, at night, the villagers could hear his screams like the plaintive wails of an animal in distress. Only in rare, more lucid moments did

he venture to brush with civilization. Never, though, had he been known willingly to approach a crowd, much less seek to mingle with others of his natural kind.

But this day he behaved differently. As the Lord stepped ashore and began, patiently, to meet the curiosity, the thoughtless press and clamor of the crowd which quickly gathered, he suddenly made bold to move toward the growing knot of people. Pushing aside men and boys alike, the wild creature stalked to the side of the Master, hesitated, then suddenly fell trembling at His feet, uttering the peculiar cry which so often, of late, had fallen from the lips of demoniacs confronted by the Lord: "What have I to do with Thee, Jesus, Son of the most high God?"

Quietly, but with that familiar authority we had early learned to respect, Jesus spoke back to the evil Power holding the half-savage a slave:

"Come out of him," He said.

But this time there was resistance to the command. Utterance came from the lips of the creature, though they scarcely moved and the fixed, staring eyes gave no hint that the warped intelligence behind their gaze was responsible for the words.

"Do not send us out into the deep—not yet!" the lips said.

Across the beach, on an adjoining hillside, a large herd of swine were rooting. Swine headed the list of unclean animals, forbidden to Jews. Scrupulous Jews would never have raised them. But this community looked the other way, apparently, for here were swine, and in quantity!

"Send us into the swine," begged the lips. The Lord nodded.

Instantly the poor creature collapsed on the ground in

the throes of a violent convulsion. When the tortured body relaxed as the seizure passed, the appearance of the man was such that several who stood near declared positively: "He is dead." But Jesus reached down and took him by the hand and brought him to his feet: like all the others, a new man. One of the apostles shrugged off his own cloak and wrapped it about the man's naked body. He was cured.

But out on the hillside a commotion had begun. Suddenly alert, the swine had left off their rooting and had bunched uneasily together, squealing loudly. Then, as though driven with some kind of panic, they all turned and, splitting the air with their squeals, they stampeded down the slope towards the sea. A high bluff overhung the water at the edge of the pasture. Without slackening their insane pace, the animals plunged off that bluff to drown in the water below.

Now the swineherds had left their charges unattended when the crowd gathered about the boat. They had heard the tense dialogue between the Lord and the one demon-possessed. They saw what happened. Whereupon they hurried indignantly into the village to report the tragedy of lost swine to the authorities. These, fuming with indignation, came out in a body to the place where Jesus sat with the erstwhile demoniac at His feet now clothed and in his right mind: to demand of the Lord that He immediately leave their community.

So Jesus and His apostles got back into the boat and returned to the place from which they had come.

Even the most dread of all diseases—leprosy—responded to the Lord's divine ministration. He would happen upon lepers in His travels from city to city. They would come as close as they dared, crying piteously and waving wasted

stumps that once had been hands: "Lord, if Thou wilt, make us clean!"

The Lord's response was invariably the same. "I will," He would promise, putting the burden upon them. "Be it unto you according to your faith."

And often before the very eyes of the onlookers the diseased, sickly white skin would blush with color, the unrecognizable features would soften, and the personalities of broken men and women would once again come to life.

Now the Power which passed from the Lord to those upon whom He had pity touched their souls as it worked its wonder upon their bodies. His were not simply the acts of an extraordinary medicine man. Almost always a forgiven soul returned to its place within the healed body. Occasionally the Lord treated the deeper need before He touched the more superficial one.

Once a totally paralyzed man was almost forced upon Him as He sat and taught in a crowded home. Four friends brought this man but, despite every effort, could not get through the press outside the house. Undaunted, they carefully lifted the paralytic to the flat, mud roof, tore at it with determined fingers until they had opened a large enough hole, then with ropes they lowered the sick man into the room where Jesus sat, depositing him neatly at the Master's very feet.

Around Jesus that day sat an unusually distinguished company. Doctors of the law from every part of Galilee and from as far away as Jerusalem itself had come together to examine this Teacher's views and evaluate His orthodoxy. Rumors were flying to the effect that the Galilean had occasionally assumed prerogatives that belonged to Deity alone in addition to doing miracles by the power of the Almighty (or of

devils, perhaps). They were here to determine once for all whether He displayed a proper respect for Torah and walked meticulously in the footprints of the Rabbis, giving due glory to God.

Most of the Doctors were properly irritated by the untoward shower of debris which accompanied the uncere-
monious dumping of human baggage at the Teacher's feet without so much as a by-your-leave. The man himself said nothing. He simply lay there, looking into the face of Jesus with undisguised longing and hope. And the Lord could see that beneath the physical need, great as it was, was a greater hunger of the soul. With the ruffled Doctors in mind, He ministered to that spiritual need first.

"My son," He promised, "your sins are forgiven!"

That shocked the Doctors speechless, as nothing else could have done. Openly and unequivocally, Jesus had assumed the divine right of absolution: of judgment and of forgiveness. If it was a case they wanted, they now had it. Nothing further need be heard, nothing further need be said. The charge would be blasphemy, the witnesses would be sufficient and competent, the case would be airtight. Out of His own mouth He had condemned Himself. This time He had gone too far.

But Jesus' promise had been no slip of the tongue, for He did not hasten to correct any possible misconception in the minds of the distinguished company. To the contrary. Far from covering up His remark or denying that absolution belonged to Deity alone, He indirectly verified it. Turning to the critical sea of faces, He demanded:

"In this case, which would require the greater authority: 'Your sins are forgiven,' or 'Stand up and walk'?"

They remained silent. It was obvious that no degree of

human power, however great, and no combination of medically proven ingredients, however skillfully blended, would make any appreciable difference in the condition of the broken wretch now lying so hopefully at the feet of his betters.

Deliberately Jesus committed Himself to the role of a physician, that He might have recognition as the Lord of Life. "So that you may know that the Son of Man has the authority to forgive sins . . ." He turned to the paralytic. "Stand on your feet! Take up your pallet, and go home!"

And he did.

Not even death removed those in whom He would be glorified beyond His reach. One whom He brought back to life was the only son of a widowed mother of the village of Nain, in Galilee. Jesus and the Twelve happened to pass that way just as this small funeral procession emerged from the gates of the village on its sad way out to the tombs. The mother walked behind the bier, supported on either side by her friends, her red eyes glancing frequently at the shroud-covered body of her dead son.

As Jesus and His followers approached the slowly moving procession, the Lord stepped forward and gestured with His hand to the pallbearers. They stood still. At His command, they placed the bier on the ground. "Do not weep," said the Lord to the woman before He turned to the body.

"Young man, arise!"

At the sound of that ringing command, the shroud stirred and then moved, and the young man sat up. Taking him by the hand, the Lord restored him to his mother.

And His fame spread farther and wider.

Then there was the case of Jairus' daughter. One day Jairus, ruler of the Capernaum synagogue, a prominent and

wealthy man, pushed his way through the crowd on the public road, to fall on his knees in the dust before the Lord. Position and prestige meant nothing now, for his twelve-year-old daughter lay dying at home and the physicians had said that nothing further could be done.

"My little girl is dying!" the big man sobbed. "Come and heal her!"

Because the ruler evidently believed, Jesus turned to meet his distress. But the crowd was large, and movement along the road was difficult. Interruptions continued as Jesus made His way to the house where He had been summoned. Then, too, He did not seem to be in a hurry, and Jairus concealed his growing agitation badly. The ruler's perturbation spread to others in the crowd, who shortly began to mutter, audibly:

"Doesn't the Teacher realize that the child's life hangs in the balance? If He doesn't intend to go quickly, why did He agree to go at all?"

Just then Jesus stopped altogether and, looking about Him, demanded loudly, "Who touched me?"

There on the dusty road, hundreds of curious, eager, and impatient people continually jostled and shoved for positions of vantage from which they could hear and watch Him. He was continually bumped and pushed despite the constant efforts of the Twelve to keep the crowd at bay. But some of Jairus' discomfiture had transmitted itself to the Twelve, and Peter voiced his impatience: "Master, with a hundred people pushing and shoving Thee, what meanest Thou by 'Who touched me?' "

But Jesus had something else in mind. He meant that He had felt healing Power go out of Him in response to the frantic hunger of someone who had surreptitiously forced her way to His side and grasped His robe. He wished them

all to know that virtue could not pass from Him unnoticed.

And the woman, realizing that she was known and that His power was neither magical nor mechanical, came forward and threw herself at His feet. For twelve years, she sobbed, a loathsome disease had plagued her. Her desperate search for a cure had taken all that she had. The best arts of the physicians had brought no relief. Hearing of Jesus and later seeing with her own eyes what He could do, she had determined to get help from Him; but, fearful lest she be considered unworthy and the Power be denied, she had not asked but simply reached out and caught the border of His flowing robe. Instantly she had felt the fountain of her blood dry up.

All this she sobbed out at the Lord's feet. Gently He touched her shoulder. "Do not be afraid. Your faith made you worthy. Go in peace."

While He was occupied with the woman, a servant came hurrying to Jairus with the news that his little girl had died. A Pharisee was heard to mutter somewhat resentfully, "Too bad!" Others were thinking, "If only He had hurried!"

But Jesus seemed unperturbed. To the contrary. Putting His hand on the broken father's shoulder, He promised, as if it were for this He had delayed, "Believe only, and your daughter will be restored to you again!"

When they reached the house, the Lord ordered everyone out. Then, taking only Peter, John, and James, together with the parents of the dead girl, He entered the room where she lay. Walking to the bed, He took her limp hand.

"Maid, arise!"

Immediately the child's eyes fluttered open, and she sat up. Gently Jesus handed her to her parents. "She is probably very hungry," He remarked. "Give her something to eat."

And, for many, a new concept of Him was born.

Along with His works of healing and restoring, this Lord of Creation sometimes worked a miracle of creation. The most spectacular occurred one day after a great multitude of people followed Him to a desert place near Bethsaida, to hear Him speak and see Him heal. Alone in the wilderness He would not make His Deity a servant of physical hunger, but, for His own glory, this time He fed more than five thousand persons.

It had been a long day, and the multitude was tired. Some of the crowd, that day, had come from a distance, and as the shadows began to grow longer on the ground it became evident that only those who lived near by would reach home before twilight. So the Twelve interrupted His discourse to remind Him that it was late and to suggest that so large a crowd probably should be dismissed in time to reach the surrounding villages for food and lodging. Jesus replied surprisingly:

"Feed them yourselves!"

That provoked them. "How could we feed them?" they demanded, bringing out what food they had. "Here is what we have: five small buns and two baked fish. It would be out of the question to go buy: all of us together could not raise half enough money!"

Jesus nodded. "Have the people spread out on the hillside in groups of about fifty," He instructed, and took into His hands the five loaves and the two fish proffered by the disciples.

Obediently, the crowd scattered, settled, and waited expectantly. In plain view of all, Jesus held up the food as He returned thanks. Then, having blessed them, He divided the loaves and the fish and passed the food to the apostles who,

in turn, enlisted helpers and distributed it among the groups out on the hillside. Although none could say with finality just when it happened, of a sudden there was more food in the baskets than was needed. They could not be emptied. And after everyone had eaten his fill the apostles took up, of bread and fish that remained, twelve baskets full.

Jesus did not go out of His way, deliberately looking for occasions to work miracles. They occurred in the course of His strenuous teaching program, as people with diseases and wants of every kind turned hopefully to Him believing that He could help. Broken or maimed in body, mind, or soul, they struggled to catch His attention; and, having caught it, they pleaded with Him urgently and shamelessly. Most of the time He tested them first to give faith an opportunity to show. Generally He used the occasion to provide an object lesson for the disciples upon some point He wanted them to remember. There was, for instance, the blind man they met, whose persistence He used to teach importunity in prayer.

They came upon this man on their way to Jericho, as Jesus traveled, for the last time, toward Jerusalem. The man sat by the roadside, listlessly lifting his bowl whenever padding feet warned him of the approach of a traveler. Hearing now the confused sound of many feet and the hum of many voices, the blind man called out to ask what was going on. Someone told him that the Teacher of Nazareth and His disciples journeyed to Jerusalem.

The chance of a lifetime having come his way, the blind man scrambled to his feet and ran, heedless of stones in the path and thronging human bodies that blocked and turned aside his headlong plunge. "Jesus of Nazareth," he screamed, hysterically tearing at the wall of resisting robes, turning this

way and that as impatient hands pushed him sharply away. "Thou Son of David, have mercy on me!"

But the Lord had heard him and was watching his futile efforts to find his way through the crowd. "Bring him here," he commanded.

Reluctantly the crowd opened a path to the Master's side and not-too-willing hands guided the beggar to Jesus.

"What do you want?" queried the Master, testing him.

"Lord! Let me receive my sight!"

The Lord nodded. "Receive your sight!" He commanded. And his eyes saw.

Turning to His disciples, the Lord indicated the now happy man. "God wants you," He said, "to bring Him your wants: with sincere and repeated persistence!"

* * *

Add these to the measure of your faith, Theophilus. For they commended Him to all who saw and were willing to believe.

V

The People

People were His passion. I mean He first of all was a collector of men and women. Only a means to this related, but greater preoccupation were the discourses, the miracles—His generous concern for the wants of the frantic, the curious, and the hostile people who daily thronged in His wake. As He healed their diseased or broken bodies He bid for their souls. And as He stimulated their minds with His unearthly insights He demanded more than assent, and He preached more than a new code of ethics or behavior. He wanted *them!* So He preached to their basic need of Him.

“Fishers of men,” He called the executors of His Testament. Of Himself he spoke most directly as the “Shepherd.” For in the course of those three brief years He attracted people to Himself in order to enlist followers: to gather disciples.

Everything He said or did fitted into a skillful strategy calculated to win devoted men and women: to prepare a faithful few worthily to receive Power, the all-important bequest of His Testament.

Of course He went about doing good. Every day brought fresh evidence of His love and compassion. It was not a part of His nature to ignore the plaintive cry of a blind man or turn a deaf ear to the faith struggling through the tears of a

sick child's mother. None was refused who came in faith, but this benevolent part of His ministry never crowded aside His primary concern for winning men.

He was the great Physician, that is true; but neither His generation nor any other would measure Him by His ability to heal the physically sick.

He had become Incarnate to discharge the divine Will by setting up the means whereby the Way would make possible the recovery of human souls. In a sense, He, too, was a herald: of the Presence to follow. After three years of impeccable public life He would be gone, and the basic problem man faces by reason of his inability to become a worthy child of God would be solved: the solution being the gift to man of a Power greater than himself.

We did not realize it then, but from the start He lived expecting the Event. He thought about it continually, and toward it He bent every interest. For One who saw with equal clarity the merging lines of the historical past and the frightful details of His own approaching fate, as well as the secret needs of the men and women about Him, that Event became a guiding light.

Meanwhile, He sought men. Except when exhaustion or the need for private communion with His Father took Him off on those frequent retreats into lonely places for a few hours or a night, He constantly pressed His campaign to pull the prejudices of men out from under them and win them to discipleship. Before the Event came, He must spread the effect of His ministry as widely as possible, so that when the Program began the Way would be effectively accredited, and the Presence received by people already prepared to understand.

Now within this ministry His dealings with people were

characterized by no class partiality or cultural prejudices whatever (except when the worship of culture kept someone who needed help from attaining the humility necessary to find it). It made no difference to Him who bid for His favor, so long as the bid was accompanied by an acknowledgment of spiritual bankruptcy. He walked with equal freedom among rich and poor, counting the master of equal value with the slave.

Not even the professional religionists could claim a seat of honor in His company. Indeed if anyone had His special attention, it was the uneducated, the unprosperous, and the unwashed: in short, the untouchables of a pitiless society.

Sometimes we thought Him too attentive to those living on the unsavory fringes of society. Occasionally we protested openly His gentle interest in some notorious publican or shameless woman of the streets. Because we could see no profitable reason for His preferences, a few of us concluded that He must be trying to make a special appeal to the "common man": to enlist the pliable allegiance of the eternally hopeful underprivileged to the exclusion of the better classes. As a matter of fact, a great many of those who followed him for a while confidently expected Him any day to launch a great revolt, not only against political demagoguery, but also against wealth and entrenched social privilege.

He did go to the masses, but the reason for His partiality in that direction did not become apparent until after the Event. Despite the penetrating clarity of His discourses most of us failed completely to isolate, from those significant occasions when He reached a point of special correspondence with some poor unfortunate, the simple elements in the petitioner's appeal and the Lord's response that brought them together. Stupidly, we missed the obvious significance

of the desperate, yearning helplessness that characterized every successful bid for His favor. We did not notice that when He discriminated, it was wholly on the basis of need: those needing Him most receiving the prompter attention.

The Physician of souls could do something only for those who admitted they were sick. If notorious sinners became His closest friends, it was simply because their obvious need prompted them the more to seek help. He would have welcomed their more prominent neighbors with just as much love, had they come with equal humility. But the righteous Doctors studied Him curiously from outside the wide circle of His warm sympathy, simply because their untouchable self-esteem dropped a moral curtain between His power to help and their need which never had a chance to break through.

The unbending never found Him a friend; the broken never found Him too busy to care. And everyone—whether worthy or wanton—who saw himself weighed in His balance and found wanting, was warmed by His love.

He was rejected because His religion demanded self-examination and self-condemnation: and the spiritual overlords of His day were not willing to acknowledge themselves sinners.

I shall have more to say later of how utterly impartial He was in His attitude toward men. For an occurrence which perfectly reveals both the heart of His interest and the response He too often received, I shall describe here a visit He once made early in His career to His home village of Nazareth.

The citizens of Nazareth had heard some of the tales that were circulated about the village's celebrated Son. From Cana and Capernaum had come evidently authentic reports of such signs as water turned into wine and of sick

persons made well. Half believing but more generally incredulous, the Nazarenes had waited impatiently for Jesus to pay His home town a visit, that they might verify the stories and bask in the reflection of His fame. Whatever the significance of the things He had begun to do since His departure southward, His former neighbors were practically sure of one thing: they stood to gain in almost every way from any public recognition that Nazareth claimed Him as a Son.

So it was that cautious deference was mingled with great curiosity when they welcomed Him one Sabbath into the familiar home synagogue. When the time for the lesson came the ruler of the synagogue, in a gesture of respect for the reputation as a prophet which had preceded this young Man's return to the village, handed Him the book of the prophet Isaiah. The Lord took the book, opened it, and read to them Isaiah's description of the Messianic blessings to come:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me
to preach the Gospel to the poor;
He hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted,
To preach deliverance to the captives
And recovering of vision to the blinded;
To set at liberty those that are bruised;
To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

When He had finished reading, the Lord closed the book and, according to custom, sat down to speak. With the inquisitive gaze of all in the synagogue upon Him, He announced quietly:

"Today you see before you the One who fulfills this prophecy!"

What followed led Him to comment, "No prophet can expect to be received in his own country." For with a con-

tempt too hastily aroused by the familiarity of the figure seated before them, the Nazarenes closed their minds to everything else He had to say. Despite the gracious words from His mouth (which they acknowledged and commended), they turned away from the thought that He should be the Messiah with ill disguised contempt.

And so the Lord met directly the disbelief He read in their faces. Prodding them further, He not only exposed and then rejected their greedy hope that they might enjoy some special benefit from His fame, but did so in such a way as to indicate that His rejection of them also implied a divine one. Calling to mind the Old Testament stories of foreigners who had obtained mercy when Israel remained under the discipline of divine displeasure, Jesus identified Himself with His Father unmistakably, implying that if they disbelieved Him they cut themselves spiritually adrift.

He said: "There were many widows in unfaithful Israel in the days of Elijah, but only a faithful foreigner from Sarepta received divine aid by his hands." And, He continued pointedly, "Many lepers roamed in Israel in the days of Elisha, but only Naaman, a Syrian, was cured."

The men of Nazareth read correctly the clear rejection implicit in those words. Their vanity wounded, their spiritual poverty successfully concealed, every entrance for Grace effectively blocked: muttering savagely, they laid violent hands on their Lord, dragging Him from the synagogue and rushing Him to the brow of a near-by precipice. But the time when He would submit meekly to death was not yet, and so He brushed them off and walked calmly out of the midst of a suddenly impotent mob.

From the teeming population of Galilee, Jesus selected twelve men to become His apostles, or envoys. These Twelve

did not volunteer for the intimate, full-time relationship they sustained to the Lord: they were chosen and called. They were not especially trained for the enormous responsibility they later would bear: some of them hardly were qualified to occupy any responsible place of leadership. None could claim on his own to be capable of molding opinion. You can hardly imagine any of them, without the Presence, ever leading a public meeting or starting a revolutionary religious movement. They were fishermen, traders, merchants; one was a despised turncoat tax collector; one remained an unrepentant thief.

What held them until the day of the Presence was the Lord's unearthly personality: the assurance and authority of His power. Each had continued to follow the daily routine of his chosen vocation—until He called. When He did, something in His manner captured their allegiance and made willing bondslaves of them. Each one dropped what he was doing and obediently answered the summons.

Peter and Andrew, brothers, who were partners in the fishing business with James and John the sons of Zebedee, received their commissions this way:

One cloudless summer day Jesus stood by the Sea of Galilee, the center of a great throng of men and women who had come from near-by Decapolis and Capernaum to see and hear Him. With no convenient spot ashore from which He could make Himself heard and seen by so many people, Jesus looked about and saw Peter's boat pulled up on the beach with its owner busily helping his brother and their partners mend their nets. For a platform from which to speak, Jesus pressed the boat into service; and the fishermen found themselves listening with the throng to the divine Teacher as He preached to their spiritual poverty from the stern of the boat, bobbing a few clear yards from shore.

Afterward, when the crowd had reluctantly dispersed, the Lord turned to Peter. "Push out into deep water, and let down your net."

"Master," the big fisherman replied doubtfully, "we fished all the night long and caught nothing." Then, respecting the insistent look in the Lord's eye: "But if you say so we will try again."

The boat moved out from the shore, and the net dropped over the side. Then, as Peter and Andrew began to draw the net back, they found they could not raise it. Trembling taut strands of hemp told them it was full of fish. Excited, they called to their partners for help. Only after much straining and tugging by all four did they finally lift the loaded net and empty the catch into both boats: enough to fill them to the gunwales.

After the last fish had been sent slithering beneath the thwart, the men turned with reverence toward Jesus. Peter, always quick to show his feelings, fell to his knees. "Master!" he said, trembling.

Jesus answered his fear and that of his companions with a Call: "Follow me," He said to the four. "Henceforth you will catch men."

And when they had beached the boats they left everything and went with Him. And they never again returned to fishing as an occupation.

Another whom He called to be a member of the inner circle was Matthew, one of the infamous deputy tax officials of the Roman occupation. The publican was at one of the receiving tables across which extortioners of his kind collected not only the required sums but enough in excess charges to grow wealthy in the process, when Jesus called

him. "Follow me," He said, as He had said to the fishermen. And Matthew, abandoning his detestable profession, became an apostle.

This rather indiscriminate selection by Jesus of the men to be His closest friends left other men who should have been logical for choice—temple ministers, trained legalists, religious professionals—coldly indignant. They were especially outraged by His selection of Matthew, which He immediately followed up by attending a great feast prepared by the publican in His honor: to which Matthew generously invited all his colleagues and shady friends. "He fraternizes with evil," the Doctors pontificated with cold finality. And from that time on, so far as they were concerned, the matter was closed: they were against Him.

Jesus' choice of Matthew provided the proverbial straw on the back of the religious officials' camel of toleration. To the Priests, together with the religious élite—the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Scribes of both parties—ecclesiastical superiority was equivalent to spiritual excellence. Their pattern of godliness (which the Lord so consistently violated) consisted of a prejudiced exclusiveness in which the letter of the law, defined by tradition and by their own erudite pronouncements, was the sole determining factor. For them, unless a life conformed to the prescribed pattern of public behavior, it was not acceptable to the Almighty. And any worthy person who successfully completed the prescribed course of study in the school of the rabbis became a worshipful master of the faithful.

By their own standards, these formal religionists were faultless: no one denies that. But their standards, compiled largely out of tradition, needed a vast overhauling. For they

had modified the ethics and the morality of the law which was designed to convey an impression of the quality of divine holiness, according to the practical limitations of class, caste, rank, nationality, and station (without overlooking a man's ability to pay). Thus religion, as they had established it, was not on a basis of spiritual need, but on a basis of legal and academic attainment, and was loosely interpreted in certain essential areas and very strictly interpreted in certain unessential areas.

In the eyes of the Doctors it was not through need resulting from sin that a man became eligible for divine favor: it was through the ecclesiastical pedigree he managed to inherit, buy, or build for himself. The Lord's impatience with these worthless standards, and His exasperating habit of brushing them aside to go straight to the hungry soul seeking forgiveness, left the Doctors quivering with indignation.

"He eats and drinks with publicans and sinners!" they accused, because they could see only face value.

"They that are well do not need a physician," He answered calmly and significantly, "only they that are sick." "I came not to commend the righteous, but to call sinners to repentance," He continued with finality, indicating the vast gulf between a God who sees the helplessness of every human effort and spiritually blind men who believe their miserable righteousness is holy and just and good.

If He did not conform to the established spiritual order, it was because He brought a new one. If He did not distinguish between personalities on the basis of His opponents' estimates, it was because He respected no one for what he could accomplish and saw that everyone needs to be reborn. And just as every personality needs replacement, so He destined

the total religious order of His day for reconstruction under the Bridegroom whose marriage to the Church would launch, for her, a completely new existence.

Cryptically the Lord commented on the opinion of the Pharisees and Scribes of His disciples: "No one would try to patch an old garment with just a piece of new cloth. Else the new cloth, in shrinking, would tear a hole greater than before. And no one would risk putting new wine into old bottles, for the process of fermentation would tax the elasticity of the old skins beyond their capacity to stretch, and they would burst!" By which He suggested that He took only men who had been made over.

So He made uncouth fishermen and ill favored politicians charter members of the Kingdom of God.

In addition to Peter, Andrew, James, John, and Matthew, the Lord summoned seven others to the privileged intimacy of the apostolic relationship. They were Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, James and Jude (sons of Alphaeus), Simon Zelotes and, finally, Judas of Kerioth who would betray Him.

Also included among those who followed Him faithfully throughout three apprentice years were several women. These included the once devil-possessed Mary of Magdala, Joanna the wife of Herod's steward, and Susanna. It was hardly a group you would expect to find congenial together. But the very fact that they had little in common focused attention upon the unique bond which added the quality of compatibility to their company. And their wide differences indicated the universal scope of the interest of the Lord who called and bound them together.

For Jesus did not reserve His attentions to His own people. Besides His curious indifference to cultural or even ethical distinctions among His own Jews, He often acted with little

regard for race or nationality. Gentiles as well as Jews came to feel the gracious effect of trust and faith humbly offered with an acknowledgment of sin and of need. Clearly He counted all people potentially children of God. And often His search for men willing to believe ended with greater effect at the doorstep of a Roman or a Syrophenician or a Samaritan than at that of a Jew.

Once He found the faith that deserved His attention, of all places, in an officer of the Roman occupation: a centurion. This man, powerful among his own proud kind, approached the Lord on behalf of a servant—a mere slave, desperately ill—through the elders of Capernaum where he was garrisoned. “Help him,” the Jewish messengers begged the Lord, “for he has done much for our people. He is worthy of Thy compassion, for he has built us a synagogue!”

Despite the materialistic basis of the claim, the Lord turned willingly to go to a man so humble and self-deprecating that he had made his approach indirectly through friends he had thought would be better received. Now, when it became evident that Jesus Himself intended to set foot in the officer's home, another messenger, this time a servant, came in horrified haste to intercept Him.

“My master, the centurion, is troubled that Thou shouldst have considered his petition a summons,” apologized the messenger. “He does not believe himself worthy of Thy presence, or he would have come to Thee himself. Thus he begs that Thou stoop not to enter his house. Just say the word, that the slave may be healed.

“For he believes that, as his authority extends over those under his command, so Thine efficaciously exacts obedience of forces and laws beyond the range of human authority!”

This testimony left the Lord visibly moved. “I have not

found so great a faith," He announced to the petitioning elders from Capernaum, "no, not in Israel!" And before the messenger reported back the slave recovered.

On another occasion a half-breed Samaritan evidenced the humility He sought, and that genuine appreciation for what men must receive from God alone. Doing so, by the way, the Samaritan became a party to another comparison unflattering to Hebrews. This man was one of a group of ten lepers who called to Him outside a certain village as He passed through from Galilee to Jerusalem for His approaching Passion. "Jesus, Master," the ten cried from that respectful distance unclean persons were required to maintain, "have mercy on us!"

He noticed them immediately, but answered curiously: with a demand for obedience within which hid a promise conditioned upon faith. "Go," He commanded as though the cure had already taken place, "and show yourselves to the priests."

And as they obediently went they were healed. But only the animal flesh was restored for nine of the ten: only their bodies were healed. Concerned only for physical well-being, these groveled before Him until He granted their request, then promptly forgot the gift, thereby denying, by neglect, the brighter favor proffered by the giver—and went away stupidly content.

That is, nine of them did. The other, a Samaritan, mute with gratitude for what he had received, hurried back to satisfy his soul at the fountain which had washed his rotten flesh clean. He plainly felt that gratitude for the gift called for thanksgiving to God, yes, but at the feet of Him who, having met the lesser need, could surely fill the greater. More than simple thanksgiving welled out of the Samaritan's heart

as he offered his gratitude to the Lord—and he got more in return.

"Arise, go your way," He said. "Your faith has restored you—altogether."

As He lifted the happy man to his feet, Jesus looked around at the Doctors near by who would never have dragged their gold-trimmed robes through the dust before anyone; and the caste-conscious rabbis who, worshiping ancestors more humble and therefore more worthy than themselves, long ago had made up their minds about anyone who would give of Himself to a bundle of Samaritan rags. "Ten were sent on their way," He half murmured. "Yet only one returned to give glory to God: this stranger!"

Throughout His ministry Jesus continued to find in unexpected places the special qualities of spirit He sought, to the horror of all literal-minded Jews and the confusion of the rabbis. They, to all practical purposes, defined religion as the outward practice of respectability. He, on the other hand, continued to call men like Zaccheus the publican.

Zaccheus, a man of considerable wealth, supervised the collection of revenue within the entire Judean tax district. When Jesus came through Jericho on His way to Jerusalem for the last time, this chief of publicans cast caution and dignity to the winds in his eagerness to catch a glimpse of Him as He passed by.

Now Zaccheus was unusually short of stature. Consequently, the tight throng of disciples and dignitaries left him jumping futilely up and down on the outskirts of the crowd in completely unsuccessful attempts to see.

So, having noted the direction the crowd traveled, he ran ahead to a tree whose branches overhung the road. Scrambling up, the publican perched precariously in the branches

while the throng flowed past, just below. At last, through the dust raised by many feet, he saw the Master near the center and followed Him with hungry eyes until He was immediately below. Then the unexpected happened: Jesus, looking up, read the hunger of the publican's soul and saw his willingness to acknowledge it.

"Zaccheus," He called out clearly so that the fretful crowd could hear, "come down quickly. Today I intend to stop at your house!"

A shocked silence followed the words. Incredulous, the dignitaries traveling with Jesus watched as the publican quickly slid out of the tree. Then they exploded in a babble of surprised and contemptuous voices, covering the sound of the man's tearful voice promising the Lord out of an overflowing heart from his knees in the dust:

"The half of my possessions, Lord, I will distribute among the poor; and whenever I find a man I have robbed I will repay him fourfold!"

The troubled spirit had found rest. For, as Jesus declared, salvation had come into that house: "The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost!"

So it was the lost that met Him in that inner communion between sinner and Savior which takes place whenever the spirit of man quits its hopeless fight to stand alone and, no longer proud, confesses its need. The Lord brought this basic requirement out clearly one day in another encounter. This time He was dealing with a woman the depth of whose need had led her to meet Him on that level of humility where His true Being and Purpose invariably stood revealed. As usual, her humility effectively tapped the divine resources He was always prepared to make available.

A Pharisee named Simon one day invited the Lord to his

house for a meal. While they were at the table, this woman came. A known harlot, she somehow managed to slip unnoticed past the watchful servants and make her way to the Master's couch. One minute Jesus reclined alone; the next, this woman crouched fearfully at His feet, unmindful of the murmurs of disapproval from the host and his guests.

Desperation flickered in the woman's eyes. Her hands held an alabaster box filled with oil from the East. Suddenly she began to weep. Hot tears fell upon His feet, and she wiped them off with the long, coarse hair which hung loosely to her waist. Fumbling, she opened the box, whereupon the fragrant, exotic perfume permeated the room with its heady odor. She poured the entire box of oil over His feet in the ancient, oriental gesture of homage.

The Pharisee watched the little drama with mingled disapproval and disgust. "If this man really were a seer," he muttered into his beard, "he would know what sort of woman this is, pawing over him."

The remark, although muttered, did not escape the Lord. He looked from the sobbing woman at the foot of His couch to the haughty Pharisee at the head of the table. Here, indeed, was a significant contrast:

On the one hand, the exalted Doctor of Religion, teacher of the law, self-appointed spokesman for the Almighty, judge of all men (and women) who ranked lower in ecclesiastical station than himself. Simon had grudgingly admitted to himself a high regard for the Teacher, although he could not agree with His methods and His unorthodoxy in legal matters. Still, His power was beyond question, and Simon was not one to pass up any opportunity to ingratiate himself with One whose favor might some day come in handy. Yet he had no intention of being influenced by the Galilean's untried

ideas, and he would be one of the first to express an unfavorable judgment if the Galilean should unwisely misstep.

On the other hand, there was the prostitute, creature of the streets. Unhampered by self-respect or by reputation, she came easily to that necessary point of self-condemnation at which the Grace of God can take over. Therein, perhaps, lay the great difference between these two. Already beaten to her knees, she had but to open her heart and pray, whereas Simon's exalted station made the distance to the Master's feet prohibitive. Certainly it was much too great a distance for one who began by looking down haughtily upon the Galilean.

Simon contemptuously judged the Lord's indifference to the external signs of the woman's ancient profession. Yet it did not take a seer to judge that she was a sinner. To the Lord, she and Simon stood shoulder to shoulder on the same level in that respect. But His special insight entered at the point where He recognized that she knelt receptive to any mercy He might be willing to show, instinctively believing that He could offer the peace her anguished soul required. So He told her:

"Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

After the woman had slipped from the room with her head held a little higher and a new light in her eyes, the Lord turned to meet the hostile gaze of the assembled guests. He had offered forgiveness of sins to that woman!

"Simon," He said quietly to the Pharisee, "I have a story to tell you.

"A certain creditor had two debtors: the one owed him five hundred pence; the other fifty. When they had nothing

with which to pay, he freely forgave them both. Tell me, now, which of them will love him most?"

The Pharisee smiled indulgently before replying patiently, as to a child, "He to whom most was forgiven, of course." But if he got the point he dismissed it lightly as of no consequence.

In Simon, Doctor of Religion, the face of the Enemy could be seen. And let it be said with shame that organized religion furnished the opposition He faced. The extremely conservative party of the law and of tradition—the Pharisees—the liberal and aristocratic, priestly Sadducees, the legal Scribes of both parties, and the ordinary priestly order made up one party to the controversy, if it may be called such. On the other hand stood Jesus of Nazareth, Deity Incarnate. And in the middle, the people, great and small, rich and poor, Jew, Gentile, and proselyte.

Very soon after He began His ministry the issue was joined. Those members of the religious sects had first been curious, without committing themselves; but, once the tenor of His message became clear, they took issue with Him, at first gently, debating the matter as men who are sure of themselves sometimes will criticize kindly the untried theory of some newcomer to their field. When they saw that He not only would not submit, but preached a brand of spiritual awareness that demanded their own voluntary surrender, they became openly hostile.

Thereafter, the contest was open, continuous, and all-out. Privately they plotted His defeat. Publicly they launched careful attempts to discredit Him. They tried tricking Him into some indiscretion, either in behavior or in speech, upon which to base a criminal charge. They sought to have one of their representatives continually on hand when He taught.

Whenever possible, they interrupted His teaching to cross-examine Him with controversial questions.

The steady tempo of their attack grew daily more intense until finally it had its effect and the people began to fall away. As the tide turned, it became clear that they would not stop short of His death. A long time elapsed before they summoned enough courage to seize Him, by stealth and deceit; but then, true to their purpose, they killed Him for a while.

The chief source of friction between the Lord and these religious parties probably was His fearless and outspoken indictment of much they held dear, together with His unflattering exposure of their notorious religious sham and pretense. He openly rejected most of the trivial regulations which the tradition of the later commentators had added to the ordinary precepts of the law. And then He taught a contrary and more humanely subordinate interpretation of the law itself. Brushing aside the superficial and basically counterfeit piety upon which they based their religious reputations, He returned religion to the realm of the inner man and his soul—where it belonged.

Most unforgivable of all (from their standpoint), He reduced all men to a common spiritual denominator, and that virtually at humanity's lowest moral level in the sight of God. No one, He declared to their unbounded fury, is excusable from Heaven's universal condemnation of men. While good conduct is a product of godliness and of a spiritual rebirth (He insisted), superficially creditable behavior may neither substitute for nor necessarily guarantee the kind of righteousness which truly counts.

Throughout His ministry the Lord faced these powerful opponents, unafraid. He charged them publicly with both

moral and spiritual depravity. When it became evident that they valued their established positions above the welfare of their own souls, when He saw that they would oppose Him to the end rather than admit their need to reform, He repeatedly called them *hypocrites*, with a terrible severity.

The Doctors considered Him as an enemy. He, of course, mediated in a special way the unbounded love of God. But in a righteous passion against sham and greed and hypocrisy that often erupted in furious indignation, He plainly showed that love and mercy have meaning only as they make room for wrath and judgment as well.

On a certain occasion He was invited to the home of a Pharisee for a meal. Before sitting down the host and the other guests devoutly bathed the palms of their hands in the prescribed ceremony of purification. Jesus did not, and thereby evoked a contemptuous remark by His host. But as the Pharisee audibly drew the robes of his piety close about him against this One whom he judged to be but an uncouth violator of the law, Jesus spoke up with typical directness:

"You Pharisees wash the outside of the cup and call it clean! Do you not realize that the Creator sees behind the clean appearance you present for His inspection to the spiritual and moral putrefaction within?

"Woe to you, self-appointed spiritual guides. You separate, with solemn care, a tenth of herbs and spices and trash unto the Lord, all the while ignoring the more basic demands of righteousness and justice and charity. You put first things last!

"Woe to you! You who vie for places of honor, who covet the worshipful glance of respect in the public's eye. Hypocrites! You are like slaves boasting of their freedom, you whited sepulchers!

"You impose laws upon the people until they no longer can bear the weight of their assessments, but never once do you offer them a way of relief. You venerate the memory of prophets who died because they dared oppose the edicts of your own forefathers, all the while contradicting your protestations of reverence by prizing, for your religious tradition, those selfsame edicts. You prove yourselves true sons of your fathers by continuing to persecute anyone who truly speaks in the name of the Lord!

"Woe to you! For you have carried off the key of knowledge of the temple of your God. And now, unwilling to enter yourselves, you deliberately hinder all others who might wish to go in!"

Unaccustomed to such treatment, the Doctors were driven almost into a frenzy by His bold denunciations. They became increasingly determined to find some evidence—anything—that would serve to bring Him to trial.

When the face of the Enemy became bolder and the opposition grew until it assumed dangerous proportions, some of the disciples began to wonder why the Lord did not take steps to offset it. They could not understand His attitude toward His enemies. Although willing to become vehement against spiritual corruption, hypocrisy, and entrenched privilege, He seemed to welcome persecution. An enemy of evil, whether in the soul or in the mind, He was no enemy of any person:

"Beware of the poison of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy," He would say to His disciples. But He encouraged them to expect opposition, and He talked as though they must always expect to be persecuted, almost as though Wrong would be "forever on the throne." Contrary to their more optimistic expectations, He never intimated that His

Kingdom would at any time upset the balance of worldly power, conquering the earth within this present era.

It was this meekness in the face of what seemed to be defeat that perplexed His disciples, unable (of course) to imagine the nature of the Program to follow. It puzzled them to hear Him speak easily of persecution, calling it a part of the normal price they would pay for following Him.

"Be not afraid," He urged, "of those who can kill the body, for your Father will not forget you. He who does not forget a sparrow, worth less than a farthing, will not forget you.

"Fear only the temptation to falter in your stand before men. For whosoever shall acknowledge me before men, him will I acknowledge before God; but him that denies me before men, I shall deny before God!

"And yet," He added cryptically, "your allegiance will not center directly upon me, but upon the Presence whom I shall send. And if you deny Him you will not be forgiven in this life or the next, for you will deny the One who can avail you.

"So, when they drag you into synagogues and before magistrates, be not concerned how you will speak or what you will say: for the Presence will extend His counsel even to the answers you will give in the hour of trial."

In those days none of us had any idea what He meant by cryptic utterances of this kind. The time when all the pieces of the Event would be fitted together into an intelligible whole was yet distant. We understood none of His references to the future (which is understandable, of course, in view of the fact that we hardly understood His other teachings). But His relations with us did not depend upon understanding and intelligent cooperation. We followed in blind

faith most of the time, because we believed that He was the proper object of our trust in matters respecting our relation to God. And while we never really understood we received frequent evidences of a convincing kind to sustain the faith we did have that He was the Way, whatever it might be.

Such a sign, perhaps the most convincing of the entire three years, was given to but three of us: Peter and the brothers James and John, whom He took on one of the frequent trips into the hills which He ordinarily made alone.

It was His habit periodically to retire into a place of solitude either in the wilderness or on a mountain, there to draw upon His Father for the strength He needed. Now He took these three intimates to the top of a near-by mountain of Galilee. On the top they saw signs that He would spend the night quietly in prayer, and so, when He went aside a short distance alone, they scattered and made themselves as comfortable as they could on the ground.

In the middle of the night the sleep of the three apostles was broken by the sound of voices and the brilliance of an unearthly light breaking through the clouds above. Startled, they struggled sleepily to their feet. Before them, bathed in brilliant light, stood Jesus. But it was Jesus as they never had seen Him: His countenance radiant and His clothing glistening. Surrounded by this shimmering, white glow, he was talking to two figures.

From nowhere they had come, to stand face to face with the Master and to share the glory of that shimmering light. Somehow, the apostles did not need to be told who the figures were: the one was Moses, who centuries before had stood on a mountain himself and received the first detailed disclosure God made of Himself; and the other, Elijah, who

had walked with God and then was not, in the days of King Ahab of Israel.

Peter, like his fellows, was well-nigh petrified by the incredible testimony of his senses; but he always managed to have something to say, and now he finally found his tongue: "Jesus, Master, it is good that we are here. Permit us to build three shelters on the mountain, one for each of you?"

While the words were still in his throat a cloud swept white out of the darkness and covered all, blotting out the stupendous scene which the three apostles later testified they had not mistaken. Out of the cloud a mighty sound became a Voice and intelligible words:

"This is my beloved Son. Accept this Word!"

And then the light faded, the cloud swept on, and three astonished fishermen found themselves once again alone with Jesus in the starlit darkness in which earlier they had fallen asleep. Whatever He might thereafter say or do, one thing would remain perfectly sure to each: in Him was the Word—and Eternity itself.

Now while the Lord's interest in humanity was universal, the degree of intimacy between Him and any single person depended entirely upon the depth of that person's acknowledgment of Him in faith. Expediency never determined the company He kept, for it was basic within His ministry that all men stood on the same level, respecting their spiritual need. He was never tempted to cater to anyone because of a prior claim of whatever kind. The distinctions which He may seem to have made between any who followed Him can be explained by the different degrees of appreciation which we attained, both of His true nature and of His mission.

Outsiders joined the little group of disciples in one way

only: they recognized their spiritual bankruptcy and came to believe that in Him, somehow, their need would be met. Thus men who turned to Him from the depths of their spiritual poverty found themselves His friends; men, on the other hand, whose interest was simply curiosity or a personal desire for gain, never really knew Him at all.

Not even His own earthly family stood higher in His favor because of their connection. As a matter of fact, His brothers and sisters stubbornly refused to believe until after the Event, and they never shared the intimacy which those who were truly His enjoyed.

One day some members of his family tried to get His attention while He was busily engaged with the crowds. They wanted a private audience, and when they could not even work their way to His side because of the throng, they managed to pass a message by word of mouth: "Your mother, with your brothers and sisters, is waiting outside to see you."

His retort shocked the deliverers of the message: "My family consists of any who, hearing the Word of God, act upon it!"

But His voice mirrored no disregard, nor did He intend disrespect for His mother. The people who had passed the message from His family expected Him to divert His attention to the little group waiting outside. He simply indicated that no one enjoyed a special or prior claim upon His attention by virtue of human kinship alone, however close the bond. Before Him, all were equal, regardless of human ties. Human as well as divine in that unique mingling, without a merger, of natures, the Lord nevertheless was not bound by human ties, even to His family.

He brought this out on another occasion. As He was preaching to the crowd one day a woman, carried away

with the enthusiasm of the moment, called out of the crowd: "How fortunate the woman who mothered you!" Quickly the Lord corrected her: "Blessed, rather, they who, hearing the Word of God, keep it!"

Discipleship, He frequently indicated, demands entire commitment. Following Him began with a total surrender of both will and life. Always ready to meet any need humbly acknowledged, any petition humbly made (so long as it came from a heart surrendering in faith), He just as quickly rejected the qualified petition of the part-time offer. The demands of discipleship, he said again and again, cannot be satisfied with part-time devotion. Accepting Him affects the whole of life, flinging open every closely guarded closet, laying bare every secret, determining every act.

To be sure, ambitious people managed to attach themselves to Him as they do to any prominent person; and they tried to impress Him with flattery and great protestations of fealty. But He always discouraged them, and they usually went away, seeking more profitable alliances elsewhere. Typical of such parasites, most of whom looked for an earthly kingdom, was a young revolutionary who one day offered grandly: "Lord, lead on, and I for one will follow to any place or destiny!"

The Lord replied evenly, shattering the man's dreams of grandeur: "Foxes have holes, and even the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man does not have a place to lay his head."

The Lord could not tolerate half-heartedness. One man whom He had called, hesitated. Not sure whether he really wanted to pay the price, this fellow tried to postpone the decision by begging time to meet certain personal obligations

he suddenly thought of. But Jesus rebuked him for trying to evade the Call. "Let the dead bury their dead," He replied, referring to the man's use of family responsibilities as an excuse.

Another disciple answered the Call, but then begged leave to return home and wind up his affairs. Jesus replied, "No one who looks back after putting his hand to the plow is fit for the kingdom of God!"

The summons to discipleship, then, cannot be set aside or postponed for any other commitment, however important. The Master was not suggesting that life's normal obligations do not count. He rather put discipleship within a separate category which, belonging to the basic issues of time and eternity, necessarily ranks ahead of all temporal considerations. Naturally the welfare of the soul comes first. For only as the proper answers are given to the basic questions of life can lesser responsibilities be properly met. Only when the soul has settled its destiny can it turn effectively to meet its obligations along the way.

Another time Jesus was the guest of two sisters, Mary and Martha, in the small village of Bethany outside Jerusalem. For Martha, His coming meant a thousand additional things to do; and she left Him alone while she scurried about her work. As she saw it, time was too precious for idle conversation; and it irked her to notice her sister, completely enraptured but also completely idle, at the feet of the Master. As more time passed and Mary continued to sit, Martha reached the end of her patience.

"Master," she fumed heatedly, "perhaps you have not noticed, but my sister neglects her duties, having left all of the work to me! Tell her to leave you in peace and spend more time where she belongs!"

Jesus failed to react as expected. Instead of agreeing with her, He replied with just a hint of rebuke:

"Martha, you are much too preoccupied with secondary things. Because your time is completely taken with routine duties, I have come into your home as just another guest, another mouth to feed. Mary, however, has been more discerning. Few things in life are absolutely necessary, and many of life's true essentials are not physical. Your sister has chosen wisely, and I shall not rebuke her. This is where she belongs!"

Thus, Theophilus, He moved about among the people: calling some, judging some, a friend of those who humbly sought a friend, a foe of hypocrisy and deceit. An ever present help in trouble, He stood just as ready to scold, with the heat of righteous passion, those who made religion a thing of convenience, of gain, or of politics.

From His own lips we heard an explanation of His mission: to call and to school a company who, beyond the Event, would be His agents in the Way which would make the Presence a reality in the lives of men and women who would become His. Using the cryptic language He so often employed, the Lord graphically described the world as a ripe field of grain, and the coming Program as the ingathering harvest. His immediate task, He indicated, was to recruit workers to gather in this harvest of souls.

Occasionally He sent the disciples out into the surrounding villages two by two, in a foretaste of their later ministry. When they returned, invariably exhilarated by their efforts but overwhelmed with the size of the task, He would say:

"Pray to the Lord of the harvest that He will send laborers to reap His harvest. For the laborers are few!"

VI

His Teaching

Hearing Him, the crowds were astonished at His doctrine, for His word was with power.

He faced the last generation to live in the Time of Preparation, to tell them that the millenniums of waiting were over. He faced the first, unbelieving generation to live in the age of personal religion, to prepare them for spiritual birth pangs they could not believe were coming.

He stood before a people preoccupied with Law, to tell them that there is nothing wrong with Law, but that God is successfully obeyed another way. He stood at the close of forty centuries of unsuccessful living, to say that it is impossible for man to be good alone—and to prepare them to believe that man soon need never again think himself alone.

To the only nation upon earth at least constitutionally committed to a high moral law, He said their virtue was no better than that of their wanton neighbors. To a people who bound themselves to obey countless precepts governing every wishful thought and waking deed, He opened His mouth to say that all of it was not enough: an infinitely holy God is not glorified by that sort of struggle after holiness.

Thus, to the religious mind which looked for its salvation to the success of its effort to behave He offered the impossible

possibility of salvation by commitment to the success of Another. And to a generation wholly preoccupied with principles He showed that principles, breaking down under the test of human futility, must yield to the Power of a Person.

For centuries Israel had struggled, with no greater success than her pagan neighbors, through successive and repeated failures to meet the unyielding precepts of her holy, God-given constitution: the law. Earlier generations of well-meaning rabbis, hopelessly despairing of success in meeting God on His own terms, had sought to meet the impossible spirit of the law by defining the letter of that law so minutely as to regulate the very number of steps a Jew might legally take on the Sabbath day. Later rabbis, on the other hand, living in more sophisticated times, reduced those carefully prepared precepts to systems of empty formality which would have been funny if they had not represented man's best effort to meet the basic needs of the human soul.

Both earlier and later generations of religious minds, however, had missed the relation that their religion had established between their inevitable futility and the altar smoke rising daily above the temple. They had also failed to relate to their own hunger for righteousness, the bleating goat which the priest annually chased into the wilderness, not really knowing what he did, nor why.

Thus Jesus, in order to promise them hope, condemned them. Promising Power, he exposed their weakness. Promising a new kind of success, He pointed out their failures. Promising they would be received, He declared they had been rejected. Promising they would be counted innocent, He found them guilty. Promising they would be perfect, He charged them with depravity. And always He spoke of a new kind of altar smoke, a different sort of goat.

Until these paradoxes became more than they could stand.

But His basic message was a message of preparation for the coming, massive Event. "My mission is to kindle a fire upon earth!" He exclaimed suddenly one day, in the middle of a discourse. "Would that it already blazed!" Looking out at the usual mixture of faces, some friendly, some curious, some hostile, He continued passionately: "I have a crisis to meet! I do yearn for it to pass!" His outburst escaped almost involuntarily, the natural protest of His humanity against scheming and hostile religious fanatics.

To understand the Lord's teaching, you must view it through the perspective furnished by the Event. Because we could not then see ahead, we must now look back to understand much that He offered in a vain effort to prepare us for what was coming. What He had to say has become understandable now only because we see that the Way brings life, changes personality, restores Him to us, and offers the hope of a brighter future. For in those days He preached judgment, law, and even division. Said He:

"I will upset the world, not pacify it. I do not bring peace, where there cannot be peace, but rather division between father and son, between mother and daughter. For the closest human ties must break under the creative Power I will send."

Thus a great deal that He taught remained necessarily mysterious; for He referred to a new order and a new concept of religion, soon to become commonplace, but then strange and incredible. Everything He said reflected in some way what lay ahead for Him and for us. All of His teachings summoned us to follow, or in some way prepared us for the Event, or else laid part of the foundation upon which the Program later would be built. He made us despair in order

that we might begin to hope. He painted His portrait of the divine holiness, to make us look at our own depravity. He left us suffocated with our own helplessness, the better to make us willing to receive that Power greater than ourselves when It came.

He told us that the law, which we took to be a rule to follow, was more than an arbitrary set of rules to govern conduct: it was primarily a portrait of a sort of perfection and thus the revelation of ultimate Goodness and Truth. Taking advantage of every occasion to press home His doctrine, He showed, unflatteringly, how the true precepts of the law place obedience beyond the reach of the most obedient. No one is faultless, no one has succeeded, all need help. This constituted the heart of His message. And when the time came for Him to go, most of us were beginning to look for another way to successful living than the illusory way of legal obligation. We were asking aloud the question He wanted us to ask, which would be answered by the Event:

"How, then, can a man live?"

He discoursed on behavior to men who thought they knew all about human conduct, who believed themselves masters of the difference between good and evil. He discussed obedience to the law with men who could say in good conscience that they did not knowingly violate any commandment: men who kept every precept set forth in the sacred commentaries. He talked about righteousness to men who kept every feast, who attended every temple service, and who tithed every basket of grain and every pound of wool. He spoke of purity to men who ate nothing forbidden, who washed before every meal, who allowed not so much as the hem of their garments to become stained by the passing shadow either of a harlot or of a publican.

And He told them all—by parable, by discourse, by example, and by precept—that it was not enough. Then He said more to men who practiced all these prescribed rites without sincerity; and what He said to them was not pleasant to hear.

He nowhere created a new law. Few of His sayings could not be gleaned from the Scriptures. He simply laid before us, in all its crystal clarity, the law we already possessed so that we saw it, as it were, for the first time.

He gave us no new system of ethics, no new standards of morality. He only showed us the ethical righteousness, the moral impeccability, and the basis of love already explicit within the system we had: pointing out with a sort of merciless compassion how far we fell short of our own constitution. At the same time He showed that our preoccupation with the letter of the law often led to excesses more oppressive and harsh than God ever intended to visit upon any who would be His.

Those extreme interpretations of the law which had made righteousness unpleasant and God's will an intolerable legal burden, He especially denounced. The common Sabbath regulations were a case in point. Within the Jewish code, nowhere could you see the excesses brought about by human additions more clearly than in the regulations prescribing what one might and might not do on the Sabbath day. Because Jesus paid scant heed to anything alien to a true concept of goodness and purity, He frequently ran afoul of the official guardians of public morals. And He came under attack most often, perhaps, for things He did in violation of traditional Sabbath observance.

Once He brought official displeasure upon Himself and His apostles for failing to restrain the Twelve from plucking

and eating ears of grain as they walked past the ripening fields on the Sabbath day. The precepts of the rabbis forbade such "work" as a violation of the Fourth Commandment. Consequently, the Pharisees openly put Him down as a willful Sabbath breaker.

On another occasion He brought down their wrath by healing a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath day. According to the commentaries, acts of healing also fell within the category of work and were therefore forbidden.

To Jesus it was bad enough that all men, however righteous in their own estimation, fell infinitely short of the ideal measure. It was worse, if possible, that human blindness had added to that ideal measure impertinent trivialities, making religion a burden and the Almighty a taskmaster. "Which is more logical," He demanded, as He healed the man with the withered hand in the synagogue itself, "that it should be right to do good on the Sabbath, or to do evil? to save a life, or to destroy one?"

On still another occasion, the complaint was that He had healed a woman crippled with a muscular disease and a man with a severe case of dropsy: both on the Sabbath. To the Pharisees' anger, kindled by these acts of mercy, He saw fit to reply:

"Which of you, having an ox that had fallen in the ditch on the Sabbath day would not take the trouble to pull it out?" When they continued obstinately mute in the face of so pointed an observation, He continued, "Nothing is more logical than that a human being, made in the image of God, should be released from pain on the Sabbath!"

And His enemies were put to silence.

Now the deeper issues of man's relation to God were not fully met, even by the clear logic Jesus used to put His

enemies to shame. For the measure of men's lives is taken on a deeper level than that represented by their conformity to the laws of Sabbath observance. Whenever Jesus talked about law, He inevitably went to the heart of the matter, showing that human motives and intents are a better measure of obedience than lip service or an outward conformity to the law's precepts. The ancient proverb had said, "As a man thinketh in his heart, so he is." Jesus, with telling blows, insisted that only thus does God judge human behavior. For God knows the heart.

To the Lord the greed, the selfishness, the hatred, and the ungodliness which lie behind and beneath our conduct are our true measure—not the deeds which the human will may force the body to perform. Ungodliness, He intimated, is a disease which may rage beneath the calmest surface and behind the most pious countenance. Down where human behavior has its origin, a man stands forth as a murderer long before he wields his knife; and pillars of the church and the lowest rakes become brothers under the skin.

For man looks upon the outward appearance, but God sees the frustrated passion for a neighbor's wife.

"Do you believe that flagrant evildoers deserve greater condemnation than their accusers who would do the same things had they opportunity and enough courage?" He asked the crowds one day. "Those eighteen men, for instance, upon whom the tower of Siloam fell: do you think their fate proved them to be greater sinners than the rest of Jerusalem at the time?"

"By no means. But I tell you that all deserve no better fate."

His sermons, delivered on mountains and wherever else the people gathered to hear, painted the portrait of God as

He is, that they might know Him and know themselves. Jesus did it by telling them of God's righteousness and His holiness; of His justice and His truth. Some heard, saw, and were smitten with the dismal reflection of their own shortcomings. Others listened with resentment. The former believed, found forgiveness and peace, with Power later on. The latter plotted and schemed until they had killed Him for a little while.

Those sermons were intended to bring the law home, by suggesting what it really required:

"Have you been told that unreasonable anger is wrong, and that you must not show wrath without cause?" He asked. "I tell you that every feeling contrary to love is of evil, whether that feeling be for a friend or against someone who has done you wrong. In order perfectly to meet the Divine measure of goodness, you would love your enemies, returning good for evil and kindness for hurt. This you would do, to be God-like!

"If you perfectly fulfilled the Commandments, you would bless them that curse you and pray for them that use you shamefully for their own ends. Pure goodness impulsively turns the other cheek when the one is struck; stands uncomprehending when one is evil spoken of; gives to anyone or to everyone who asks, especially when it is unlikely the debt will ever be repaid.

"To perfectly fulfill the law, you would do unto others as you would have them do unto you, not thereby to receive, but to make your own desires the measure of your giving.

"You would feel it contrary to your inclinations to pass judgment upon others if you truly had reason to believe yourself immune to God's judgment. Only if you have freely forgiven on earth can you expect to be forgiven in heaven.

Only if you have never condemned another will you escape Divine condemnation yourself.

"Can blind men act as guides to others who are also blind? Of course not. Then neither can any of you pass judgment upon a fellow man. When you, self-righteously, undertake to point out a brother's faults, you are like a man with a block of wood in his own eye, trying to remove a speck of dust from the eye of someone else.

"In the final analysis, your behavior is a true measure of your inner selves only if it truly reflects your inner personalities. Conduct is an accurate gauge of character only when it accurately portrays character. Otherwise it is hypocrisy. Good fruit is the hallmark of a good tree and will not grow upon a bad one. Behavior is the fruit on the human tree. An evil heart can only produce unacceptable behavior, for it is only at the level of the soul that the true measure of a man can be taken. Evil conduct implies the presence of a diseased personality. And one does not cure diseases by attacking the external spots or blemishes the inner virus may produce.

"In exactly the same way the cure of personality calls for a change much deeper and more fundamental than anything that can be done for human beings just by teaching them what is good or showing them what they must do. Goodness is genuine only when it springs from a good heart. Anything else is of evil. I have come to make possible a new heart within man. I am the physician of souls. And it is not the well man that needs a physician, but the sick!"

In sermons like this one the Lord discoursed upon the basic human needs He had come to satisfy. "I give you fundamentals," He declared, "upon which every lasting spiritual edifice must be built. If what I tell you constitutes the foundation of your spiritual house, then the superstructure will be

strong enough to withstand the winds and the rains which inevitably come. But if not, then the structure will collapse under the weight of the first summer storm. For no man's religion is stronger than the basic presuppositions upon which it is built!"

Thus He preached. "For the time being," He often said, "I must preach the coming Kingdom of God in every place."

Now we know what He meant. But then we often were bewildered by His cryptic teachings. He couldn't say much about the Way, of course, because that was beyond our sight before the Event. At best He could but try to prepare us, as well as our ignorance would allow, for the Event itself. But we didn't allow much, for whenever He spoke gently of death, as to children, we reacted negatively. We could see no connection between His dying and the Kingdom. And when the morbid note appeared in His discourses, we made every effort to cheer Him up, for we were afraid that the discouragements were making Him lose heart!

Consequently His teachings remained very elementary, even within the smaller, more intimate circle of the apostles. Frequently He spoke to our sense of values, for we were not inclined to rate the spiritual side of life above the physical:

"Cultivate the frame of mind which centers its interest in the future rather than in the present," He once told us. "That is, never let your concern for material things become greater than your love of spiritual things.

"Your life itself is more important than the environment within which you live, and thus the soul is of greater importance than the body. God is not blind to His children's needs, and He will see to yours if you fix your total affection upon Him. Consider how the lilies of the field grow: they

toil not, they spin not; and yet I tell you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like them.

"To the pagans, material wealth and power represent the highest possible value. But for you, to whom the Creator has revealed Himself, it must not be so. Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these other things will be added unto you.

"Eternal life is the prize, and that is worth infinitely more than material things which last but a little while. Lay up your treasure in heaven, where wealth is never lost and where possessions will not deteriorate. It is natural for your love to be where your interest lies: fix, therefore, your interest above, for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

"Success in no life is ever measured by the abundance of accumulated goods!"

Jesus went on to illustrate what He meant. "There was a rich man," He began, characteristically personifying the problem, "who owned great wealth in lands and cattle. Having more than he properly could use, he still pressed his servants for greater yields from his fields and his flocks.

"When every available storage facility had been filled to capacity this man could think only of tearing down and building again, larger and more roomy barns. Greedily he developed ever larger plans for expansion and storage, looking forward to a long life of pleasure and luxury. With visions of contentment dancing in his head, he said to himself one day: 'There is enough in my barns and vaults to last a lifetime. From now on I shall take life easy!'

"But God had other plans for this man," concluded the Lord pointedly. "That very night he died. What then of the wealth he had piled up so carefully?"

This was the pattern of His teaching. His general theme, if we take His teachings as a whole, was the desperate need of mankind; the readiness of God to help; the priority of spiritual considerations. And through every message ran an undercurrent of promise which included Himself in a strange and incomprehensible way, and which looked to the future more than it did to the moment He taught.

Jesus called His message the "Good News." And He would have been the first to point out that no one, hearing what he must do and what was required of him, would call the message "good news." But He did not tell us what God requires of us in order to enforce obedience. He painted the stern colors of our duty in order to make us despair of our own ability, so that, bowed down with a sense of our helplessness, we might the more willingly turn to Him. He came to unlock the door to Power. And a part of our preparation for that Event was to learn that we needed help.

He taught us in the only way we could understand: by teaching the law, by emphasizing God's holiness and His requirements. He held before us the Commandments, as a balance upon which all men are weighed and found wanting. That much we could understand. It left us somewhat despondent, but the joy of fulfillment would come later. How to live a good life in one's daily contacts was an important question; but a more fundamental issue had to be settled first.

On one occasion a lawyer put a question that he thought elementary, not because he really wanted to know, but to trap Jesus into some teaching that could be used against Him. "What would you say I should do to gain eternal life?" he asked.

"What does the law say?" countered the Lord.

"The law commands me to love God with all my heart,

soul, strength, and mind," answered the scribe. "It further requires me to love my neighbor as I love myself."

"A very good answer," commented Jesus as though the matter was closed. "Do that, and you will gain eternal life." And He moved away.

Now the answer made by the lawyer contained no new idea. It had been taken from the Pentateuch and constituted a very good summary of the Commandments. Jesus Himself had quoted the same summary earlier in answering another scribe, who had asked which of the Commandments ranked highest. He had enunciated the same principle when He said, "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you."

Neither did Jesus define some great new avenue to happiness when He agreed that anyone who followed this rule faithfully would live. From the beginning the pious Jew had so understood his law. A holy God had revealed the righteous nature of His holiness to be this, and had offered it as the key to successful living both in the now and in the hereafter.

Virtue had always been accepted as the hallmark of the Good Life.

The trouble was—and wise men had always recognized it to be so—no mere man had ever found it possible, in practice, so to live. This was what Jesus repeatedly insisted. It became the very theme of His ministry: No man has lived, or can live, up to the measure of perfect love. Hence the question of the scribe still stood unanswered.

The scribe was no fool, and he saw this. He saw that his own "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, and thy neighbor as thyself" had gone unchallenged by the Master because it did not need to be challenged. But he also saw that, if his definition stood, then his own estimate of himself must fall.

Startled, he found the tables turned. He, not Jesus, was on trial—and condemned by his own testimony!

Frantically he tried to excuse himself. "But how far must one go in concern for anyone and everybody?" he demanded. "After all, who is my neighbor?"

Jesus looked out over the lawyer's head at the crowd, waiting to hear the end of the encounter, and replied:

"I'll tell you a story. There was once a man who, while traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho, chanced to be waylaid by bandits. They beat him and stripped him and left him lying by the roadside, half dead.

"Not long afterwards, a priest came that way: a holy man, one separated to represent the people before the Almighty. The priest glanced at the bleeding figure in the ditch but hurried fearfully on his way. After a little while a Levite came by: a man dedicated to the religious life and to the temple ministry. He, too, looked at the wounded man, but made no effort to help, continuing on his way.

"Finally a Samaritan happened to pass by: no friend of him who lay bleeding by the roadside, for neither would have spoken to the other under different circumstances. But this outcast Samaritan immediately dismounted from his mule and gave such aid as he could, cleansing the wounds and binding them up. Then he lifted the helpless man and put him on his own mount, taking him to an inn down the road. All that night the Samaritan kept watch over the wounded man. The next morning he went on his way, leaving money with the innkeeper to care for the man, and promising that he would take care of any additional expense when he returned.

"Tell me," concluded the Lord, "which of these was neighbor to the injured man?"

"The one who helped him," answered the scribe in a low voice. He couldn't bring himself to use the hated word, "Samaritan."

"That much, certainly, is expected of you," said the Lord.

The curious fact of His seeming preference for the unloved was noted and commented upon by virtually everyone. In temple conclaves and wayside bazaar gatherings the people marveled at His preferring the company of beggars to that of patricians. The explanation for this apparent eccentricity is very simple. The Master Physician was offering balm for sick souls. He had no need to cultivate important people, for on the level to which He addressed Himself there were no important people: only helpless ones. Quite naturally, men intoxicated with wealth or power did not take to the suggestion that they were spiritually bankrupt. Rulers accustomed to veneration as oracles of God were not inclined to accept the suggestion that they needed help to see and understand God's will.

The outcasts of Judea and Galilee had no reputation to preserve, no citadel of influence to defend. They were more quickly attracted to One who offered help; more easily convinced they must take their chances with Him. Because His retinue was therefore filled with publicans and sinners (as it was charged) while the noble and the wealthy remained aloof, He frequently found occasion to denounce the sin of pride.

"Two men went up to the temple to pray," He said pointedly. "The one was a religious expert, a Pharisee; the other, a low-down publican.

"The Pharisee swept imperiously to his accustomed place, and aloud began to recite his virtues: 'O God, I thank Thee

I am not like the ungodly. I am guiltless of extortion, of dishonesty, and of every immorality. I thank Thee that I am not unworthy, like these publicans. Lord, remember my zeal, for I fast beyond the requirements of the law and I give tithes of all that I possess!"

"Across the courtyard," continued the Lord, "the publican presented a different sight. He was on his knees, the tears streaming from his eyes, the crushing weight of his conscience keeping him from so much as lifting up his head. Repeatedly he beat upon his breast, crying in the agony of his need, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'"

"I tell you," the Lord concluded warningly, "that publican went home without his burden. The Pharisee, on the other hand, still doesn't know he has one."

Sick hearts crying for mercy received their balm because the nature of God is Love. His is a love which searches out and claims its own; it is also a love which stands forever willing and ready to receive. Jesus promised that it was so, in all His teachings. His generation would not believe because long ago it had forgotten that the altar smoke rising above the temple ever signaled that Love would make its unstoppable way through the unyielding consistency of Law.

But He told them. With parables He told them about God's love, though they still would not believe. "If you owned a hundred sheep and one of them was lost," he asked, "wouldn't you search the country over until you found it? And once you found it, wouldn't you call in your friends and neighbors to help you celebrate? I tell you God is like that. For it is an occasion to rejoice when one more is returned, of His lost family.

"Or if a woman owned ten pieces of silver and one was lost," He repeated, "wouldn't she turn the house upside

down until she found it? And once she found it, wouldn't she call in her friends and neighbors to help her celebrate? I tell you God is like that. For it is a happy occasion when one more is returned, of His lost family."

Then He told them His most beautiful story. "In a certain family, there were two sons," He began. "The younger got wild ideas in his head one day and demanded of his father that share of the estate which one day would come to him. The father gave him his fortune, then stood by while he packed up and left.

"The young man traveled to a far country. There, with youthful mismanagement, he wasted his money away in riotous living. When everything was gone he wandered unsuccessfully from one job to another until at last he found himself competing with the pigs he had been hired to keep, for their husks of food. His downfall had been rapid, and complete.

"Starving, the young man came to his senses. The very slaves on his father's estate fared better than he—it would be better to finish his life a bondservant at home than to die alone in a strange land. Defeated, thoroughly dejected, and sincerely remorseful, he pulled his tattered rags about him and began the long journey home.

"He was still some distance from the house when his father saw him coming. Despite his ragged appearance, his father recognized him and hurried to meet him. There in the path the young man began a speech he had carefully prepared: 'Father, I have sinned against Heaven and against thee, and I am no longer worthy to be thy son.'

"But the father would not let him finish. Putting an arm around him, he led him home. There he called for water, for

perfumes and ointments, for fresh clothes. 'And kill the fatted calf,' he commanded, 'for the biggest feast of all!'

"The elder brother had not witnessed the happy reunion between father and son. A servant told him, when he came in hot from the fields, that the feast was in preparation for his brother, just come home. 'Your father,' reported the servant, 'has killed the fatted calf and turned out the house for him.'

"At the news, the elder brother began to grow angry. His father's behavior was beyond all reason. There could be no justice if a wastrel was received with more of a celebration than ever had been given for him, who never had given his father cause for concern. Furious, he would not go into the house.

"But the father sought him out and put an arm around him. 'It is not what your brother did that we celebrate,' he said gently, 'it is his return. For this your brother was dead, but is alive again. He was lost, but now is found.' "

As Jesus came to the end of the story, He paused and looked around. As usual, the crowd numbered all kinds: Pharisees, priests, merchants, lawyers, shepherds. "I have come," He said simply, looking at all those people, "to save the lost."

The question of the Lord's identity, in those days, was like one of those things that one guesses to oneself and whispers guardedly about, but seldom faces openly. Something within most people holds them back from fondling with common hands something too holy to touch. Man has not often been privileged to see beyond the mysterious veil separating the material world from Eternity. Having glimpsed, at times, things beyond his ken, he has not then been eager to share his experience uncautiously.

So it was with the awful secret the apostles half knew without being told, and felt almost by instinct: about this One for whom they had left everything the world offered. They knew who He was. But how does one get up the courage to admit to himself (let alone confess before his fellows) that he knows himself to be face to face with—God?

But Jesus brought the matter to a head Himself. Once when alone with the Twelve, He suddenly asked: "Whom do the people say that I am?"

Guardedly they replied: "Some believe you are Elijah come back to earth. Others suggest that you are John the Baptizer, back from the dead. Almost everyone accepts the idea that you are a prophet, probably the greatest of all prophets."

Any of these identities would have made Him to be extraordinary; but they all skirted, at a respectful distance, the blazing reality of true Incarnation. None made Him—God.

"But whom do you say that I am?"

Peter, always willing to step where an angel would fear to tread, spoke for the group: "Lord, we believe you to be the Christ, the Son of God."

In the electric moment which followed Peter's confession, Christ nodded. It was true. He accepted the identification. But he charged them solemnly not to share with anyone this thing they had finally brought into the open. "Mention it to no one," He commanded.

But then a new host of unanswered questions flooded in. So He was the Christ. What of it? The ancient writings promised a Redeemer, a Messiah who would save His people. But He showed no interest in government, made no effort to prepare them for revolution, and shunned political questions. He spoke of a Kingdom, and He wielded power enough to dominate the world; but He prized meekness above all traits,

and said that He would recognize none but servants as fit for His Kingdom.

Gradually it had dawned on us that His interest was solely in religion. But it also became evident that He differed from the prophets in that He did not preach an awakening: a return to former piety. Something utterly new was here. Just what, we didn't know; but it became increasingly clear that in some way He was personally, vitally necessary to whatever was going to happen. He not only had come to establish something new, He somehow expected to be IT!

In every possible way, directly and indirectly, His teaching pointed to Himself, and to nothing beyond. He called men in His own name, and He enlisted them to follow Him, and nothing else. His teaching was filled with hints of things left unsaid: a message that was like a serial story promising key episodes to follow. Whenever we pressed Him for more direct information, He replied vaguely or used one of the cryptic parables we had come to expect when He presented some crucial aspect of His teaching.

"It is enough for now that you believe in me—and follow me," He invariably said.

When He did speak plainly, it was about things we didn't want to hear: suffering and death and being buried, but not for long, and going to His Father—and the like.

"I must suffer many things," He told us bluntly on one occasion, "and be rejected by the people and be killed.

"Furthermore, to be my disciples you must subdue your natural inclinations, take up your own cross and follow me! For whoever sets out to save his life will lose it, but whoever is not afraid to lose his life for my sake will find it.

"There is no profit in gaining the whole world, for that matter, if it means you lose your own souls."

The Lord never minimized the price of Life. So basic an issue is a primary consideration, and He never let us think of it any other way. "No man can follow me who is unwilling to put discipleship ahead of father, mother, wife, or children," He declared unequivocally. "Whoever among you is not prepared to forsake all, if necessary, has not yet followed me."

His personal involvement with the basic issues of life was vividly illustrated by an encounter with a brilliant young ruler of one of the synagogues. Avoiding the crowds, this young man had managed to approach Him privately. Without hedging, he came straight to the point:

"Good Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Studying the young man intently, Jesus countered with a curious remark. "You handle that word 'good' rather carelessly," He said. "Don't you realize that only God is good?" Then, as the man waited, He demanded: "You are a ruler of the Jews. You must be familiar with the Commandments?"

"I am," the young man replied. "And I have kept them all since my childhood. But what else must I do?"

Apparently this Doctor had listened to the Lord's discourses and had caught some of the intent of His preaching, for He was unsatisfied with the law alone as an avenue to salvation. But he had missed the heart of the Lord's teaching, because he still felt that he could not be charged with having broken that law.

On the other hand, he was honestly disturbed. He seemed to sense that more was required of him than he had been able to do. And he felt this lack so strongly that he had been willing to brave the suspicion of his colleagues in order to make this private visit to the Teacher. But what could Jesus tell him? If He really answered his question, the Lord would

have to speak of things that not even the Twelve were ready to hear. And so He spoke gently to the young man:

"If you honestly seek eternal life, then come and follow me!

"But I can see that something in your life stands in the way of that commitment. I can see that your wealth is now the most important thing to you. If you would seriously pursue your quest, then go and sell all that you have. I suggest that you give it to the poor. But get rid of it! Then come to me, and you will find what you seek."

Without answering, the young man slowly turned away. And with a trace of sadness Jesus shook His head as He saw him go. He knew that the young man would not meet His offer. The coin in his eye had blocked his view of the sun. So He said to His disciples:

"How hard it is for the self-sufficiency of wealth to acknowledge it needs help! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God!"

His unyielding emphasis upon self-denial and humility, not to mention His repeated warning of dangers ahead, made it something of a wonder that anyone followed Him at all. Toward the end of His ministry, when His teachings offended so many, the crowds did turn away, and He often found Himself with hardly more than the faithful Twelve. These clung in pure faith, His credentials holding them when human judgment despaired—for His ideas of value, of piety, and of success were foreign to anything that men ever had believed.

Once a group of determined mothers pushed through the multitude around Him, bringing their children for Him to touch. Before the Twelve realized what was happening, He was surrounded by jostling women, each clamoring for Him

to lay His hands on her offspring. Alarmed and displeased, the apostles ordered the women to move back from the Master. But the Lord stopped them. "Let the children come," He said, "and don't mistake their place. For of such is the Kingdom of God!"

To the crowd he then declared: "You will never attain the Kingdom of God unless you become as little children. For it can only be entered with the unsophisticated mind of a child!"

On another occasion, the presence of a child in the crowd prompted Him to talk about how we must excel so as to advance within the Kingdom.

"He that is greatest among you," said the Lord, "will be he who has willingly served with humility wherever he could, for my sake."

Taking the child and placing him where all could see him, Jesus said, "He qualifies as being great among you, who is least."

But we understood none of these things.

Had we known then what we know today, we could have pieced together a fairly comprehensive picture of the Way. But then it was all mystery and confusion. One day, after He had been preaching on the nature of the Kingdom, the Doctors were prompted to ask the direct question:

"Where is this Kingdom to be located?"

Today His reply seems perfectly clear to us who live by the Way of a Power greater than ourselves. "The Kingdom of God is not something to be seen or located," He replied. "No one will ever be able to point it out and say 'Here it is!' or 'There it is!' For the Kingdom of God will be within you!"

But they shook their heads hopelessly.

Because the part we would play in the Program would be so important, the Lord had much to say about stewardship. Again, because we could not imagine the responsibility that would be thrust upon us, or dream that it would be a responsibility to be carried with Him gone, He taught us in vivid parables so that we should not forget, whether we understood or not.

"You are like servants in whose hands a king plans to leave the affairs of his realm while he goes off to war," Jesus told us after one especially tiring day with the people. "Or like stewards called on to administer the affairs of a merchant while he takes a necessary trip." Which was His way of teaching us that the Kingdom would come through our faithfulness to our assigned task.

"A certain nobleman," He continued, "once left his estates for another country, there to be invested with a kingdom to which he had fallen heir, and then return.

"But before he left he called his servants together and turned over to them his wealth, to be managed in his absence. To each he assigned a portion according to his ability.

"After he had gone, a popular uprising swept the lord's domain. Led by discontented subjects, a sizable proportion of the population turned against the absent ruler and proceeded to declare themselves independent. 'We have had enough of this man,' they offered as justification for the revolution.

"But in due time the nobleman returned, now king as well as lord, and with the power to make it stick. First he called his stewards to whom he had entrusted his wealth. Each came forward with his report and with his returns. One had been particularly faithful and now he presented the lord a sum nearly ten times as great as the one he had received.

Another had done well enough, and he returned five times over the investment his lord had made in him. A third servant, however, had done nothing. Jealous of wealth that was not his and unable to see that he owed anyone anything, he had ignored the hand that fed him, had taken the money, put it away, and forgotten it.

"Do you know what that lord did?" asked Jesus. "He generously rewarded the first two stewards, but to the third he said this:

" 'I trusted you with my wealth. It was not yours, but I gave it to you to be used. I expected you to put it to good use. But you rebelled not only by refusing to use my money but by keeping it from its natural increase through removing it from circulation.' Turning to his soldiers, the lord ordered, 'Take the money from him and give it to the one who was most faithful. And remove this man from my sight!'

"Having settled the accounts at home, the lord next turned his attention to the revolt which had occurred while he was gone. 'Bring the persons responsible before me,' he commanded sternly. 'I will punish them!'

In parables like these the Lord indicated the shape of things to come, through the Program and beyond. His instructions included both promise and warning. For as surely as He is both Lord and Christ, so surely He shall return to demand an accounting, as He said.

The Lord's concern for mankind is universal, Theophilus, and His invitation general. But just as only a few heeded the invitation and followed Him when He offered Himself directly to the people, so the Message fails to reach a great many today. We must expect, moreover, to see differences in response and varying degrees of commitment within those

who do hear and are attracted to the Way. Jesus made it abundantly clear that it would be so, before He left.

"A farmer went out into his fields to scatter grain," He said. "Some of the seed was carried by the wind onto the road, where passing feet killed it and where the birds picked it up. Some of the seed fell between rocks, where it germinated and sent up unsteady shoots; but lack of deep soil and adequate moisture soon killed the young shoots. Some seed dropped on ground where weeds were thick, and where fast-growing brambles choked away its life almost before it had begun. But some seed fell on fertile, well prepared soil where sun and rain pushed it up to full maturity, yielding many times over in grain the seed sown."

We were so ignorant in those days that we had no idea what the Lord meant to teach by the parable, and we clamored for an explanation. When He had us alone, He gave it to us.

"The seed," He explained, as to little children, "is the Message. Frequently it falls on ears that are no better than deaf, for it makes no impression at all. That is, some people will never respond.

"Others hear the Message with shallow minds. These were represented by the rocks lightly covered with soil. They hear the Message but do not take it into their hearts where it can do permanent good.

"A third group of hearers show every evidence of being receptive and of being the kind of soil in which the seed can grow. They begin to live. But all kinds of temptations and other interests clamor for room and soon choke the new life to death.

"Finally, however, among those who hear the Message will be many into whose lives it will fall as good seed into rich soil.

There it will take root and grow, until ultimately it bears fruit of its own."

Fertility, He meant to conclude, is the final test of every plant, including the human. The Gospel plants a living thing in the hearts of men. The final test of its vitality is whether or not it multiplies!

VII

His Passion

Inexorably the Event drew near. The Time had covered but three short years—almost too short, in point of fact, if you wished for Him time to swing the whole country to His cause. Yet the Time had been long enough for what must be done. He had started with Twelve, had caught the imagination of all the people while His popularity soared, had continued to teach while a little cloud of opposition grew until it blackened the whole sky, then had watched as the people melted away and He was left with but few more than the original Twelve. On the other hand, these faithful few had followed Him doggedly, clinging in faith through crisis after crisis until as much as they were prepared to understand had filtered through their confused minds. Yes, the Time had been enough.

Indeed the Time had been enough. For within two months the Twelve would become eight thousand from the city of Jerusalem alone!

At last the Event lay just one week away. He could look ahead as short a space of time as the interval between two Sabbaths, and it would be upon him! Now Jesus no longer wandered circuitously from city to country village. Instead He was leading the Twelve directly from Galilee back to

Jerusalem, almost without stopping, as though drawn by a magnet.

"His face is set toward the Holy City," the apostles explained to disappointed emissaries from a northern country who had hoped that He would visit them. Galilee fell behind. Then Samaria. Jericho hardly saw Him, so quickly did He pass through.

Now a greater note of urgency appeared in His teaching. His discourses, both public and private, hinted of dark things to come. To the apostles He spoke for the first time openly and baldly. "I am going to Jerusalem," He declared, "to die!

"Everything written of me in the Prophets must be accomplished. The Son of Man must be turned over to Gentiles who will deride Him, beat Him, and kill Him. But! The third day He will rise again!"

Their reaction to these private discourses was mixed. It would hardly be accurate to say either that they believed or that they disbelieved Him. The truth is, they simply did not understand. That danger lay ahead in Jerusalem, however, they were sure, for His enemies now plotted continuously, and most people agreed that He could not again visit with safety the capital city.

Actually, seven days later not one of the apostles would remember that He had specified anything about His death at all. At the moment, danger was a distinct possibility, but one too remote to bother about. Nothing in the steady pulse of the ceaseless multitude about Him, nothing in the usual rumors flying about gave any indication either of the exalted acclaim He was shortly to receive, or of the quick reversal in public sentiment that would almost immediately condemn the very One they had just acclaimed. Now He was the

center of a crowd; soon it would be a procession; but then it would become a bestial mob.

In some respects, the first day of the week of His Passion proved to be the most spectacular of His short ministry. Cheering throngs sang His praises that day, the walls and roofs of Jerusalem echoing with paeans of triumph. And for once He permitted—He even welcomed—the public's acclaim. For once He seemed deliberately to invite the homage of the people.

It happened this way:

From close by the village of Bethany, just a short distance away, He prepared to enter Jerusalem, as a groom prepares for his wedding. There would be no slipping quietly through the gates this time. This would be a Triumphal Entry, and He deliberately planned it that way. The City of David was about to greet her King. But the shouts of welcome would be for One acting in a most unkingly fashion. For He would enter lowly and with meekness, without the traditional pomp and power of kings.

On the way from Jericho into Bethany, Jesus called two of the disciples to one side and gave them specific instructions.

"Go into the village," He directed. "As you enter the gate, you will see tied to a doorway the colt of an ass. The colt is yet unbroken. Bring it to me here. If anyone stops you, tell him, 'The Master has need of it.' "

The disciples did as they were bidden, and returned leading the colt. They had long ago ceased being astonished by such things.

Jesus plainly expected to ride. One or two of the Twelve contributed their outer robes, and a saddle was improvised upon which the Lord then seated Himself. The colt, unbroken, stood patiently under its burden, then moved out

obediently at His command, the Twelve walking beside and behind.

Slowly the little procession approached the great walls of the capital city, joining the busy traffic. This was the Passover season, and the countryside bustled with activity. Streams of people wound along the roads to every gate of Jerusalem, much like ants. Somebody in one of the caravans suddenly recognized Him. Startled, he nudged a neighbor. And then the news spread like a fire from mouth to mouth:

"The Galilean is coming!"

Shouts echoed through the narrow streets beyond the walls. Hundreds of people, called from their booths, their stalls, and their houses, poured into the streets jostling one another. Surrounded by an ever larger sea of humanity, the little band of travelers found themselves the center of the biggest, most excited throng yet.

The Teacher was coming openly. What else could it mean than that He offered Himself a candidate for coronation? Someone shouted "Hosanna!" and the cry was taken up enthusiastically.

Someone else—an apostle, I believe—swept his robe from his shoulders and spread it grandly on the ground in front of the plodding colt. Others, caught up in the excitement of the moment, followed suit until there stretched out ahead of the procession a pathway defined by hundreds of colored garments. As the fever of intoxication mounted, branches were stripped from the trees near the road and added to the royal carpet upon which the Lord slowly rode His lowly mount. From the towers and the battlements of the city ahead echoed and reechoed the happy shouts of the now almost hysterical crowd:

"Hosanna! Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord!"

"Peace on earth and glory in the Highest," sang the throng.

Through the gates and into Jerusalem the boisterous procession wended its way, the Object of its excitement still quietly seated on His plodding mount while His subjects danced as they had not danced since David brought in the ark.

Carried along by the mass of humanity, a few Doctors struggled to maintain their dignity while showing their disapproval of the whole display. They had come out to see what sort of reception He would have, but they had been unprepared for this. Wrapped up in their schemings, in touch only with their own tight circle, they had come to believe that the whole world would rise against Him once they gave the signal. This frenzied acclamation dismayed them. The shouts of praise boded no good for their plans.

"Tell your followers to curb themselves!" a Pharisee shouted at Him above the din.

But He was altogether worthy, and He shook His head. "I tell you," He answered, "if these people should hold their tongues, the very stones would cry out!"

From the open countryside, the noisy procession made its way through the streets until it came to the temple, proud upon its hill, the hollow symbol of a vanished piety, restored to its present glory as a political gesture by an unbelieving Roman. At the gate, Jesus dismounted and walked straight into the open courtyard.

All around, little stalls had been erected where dealers in religious articles hawked their wares. Here and there animals were tethered, to be sold to worshipers for sacrifices. An un-

usually large number of lambs were in evidence, for this was the Passover season. In the center of the courtyard, money-changers at their gaudy tables served the cosmopolitan crowds returning from every country on earth on their pilgrimages to this holy place, the goal of every faithful Jew. It was a busy market place, this House of God.

Purposefully, formidable in righteous indignation, the Lord strode from stall to stall, ordering the merchants out. Tables were overturned with mighty sweeps of His arm, cascading coins to the pavement. Bleating sheep stampeded toward the entrance to the courtyard while pigeons fluttered skyward from broken crates.

"It is written," He thundered, "'My House shall be called a house of prayer.' But you have made it a den of thieves!" Irresistibly His wrath fell upon them, and they hurried to obey. Off to one side, the disciples watched with awe. And when it was over, the crowds eagerly pushed forward to see what He would do next.

And, calmly, He sat down and taught them there.

The hour of triumph had passed. Had He coveted the scepter, now would have been the time to launch His revolution, for the people were keyed to the highest pitch of excitement and would have swept the Romans from the city at no more than a nod from Him. But His Kingdom is not of this world. And so He spent those last few days calmly teaching in the temple, while the Doctors, sensing that His chance had passed, plotted His death with renewed hope.

His enemies, who by now numbered most of the Sanhedrin, were frantic in the desire to get their hands on Him, if they could do so without creating a popular disturbance. This would be necessary, because the people still hung on His every word and the Doctors feared the crowd might turn

against them if they moved openly. To find a legal basis for a charge, the temple politicians prodded Him almost continuously with controversial questions.

It was now just four days before the crucifixion.

"By what authority do you teach and preach this way?" they demanded. Plainly they hoped He would claim blasphemous things for Himself.

But the Lord avoided a direct answer. "Tell me," He countered instead, "your opinion of John the Baptizer's ministry, and I will answer you. Was he sent by Heaven, or did he come of himself?"

The question placed them neatly on the horns of a dilemma. If they answered "by Heaven" He would challenge them with having refused to hear him. But if they answered "of himself" they would be denounced by the very people they sought to sway, for the people remembered John as a true prophet.

"We don't know," they replied, muttering to themselves.

"Then neither will I tell you by what authority I teach as I do," said the Lord.

But He had answered their question indirectly—and they knew it. He had done it in such a way that they could only retire from the field in confusion. By referring to John, He plainly had implied that His authority came from the same source as that of the Baptizer. "Identify John's Power," He had said in effect, "and you will have mine!" And in His cryptic way He had declared that so long as they refused to honor John, they were not prepared to understand Him.

Pressing the advantage He had gained, the Lord stung them with a parable, in which He indicted them in advance for the crime they would commit so soon.

"Once there lived a man who owned a choice vineyard,"

He began. "Finding it necessary to move away, he turned his vineyard over to caretakers, telling them it would likely be some time before he returned.

"When the season for grapes arrived, this man sent a servant back to the caretakers of the vineyard, asking for samples of the fruit. But the caretakers treated the messenger shamefully, beating him and sending him back empty-handed. A second time the owner sent someone to demand an accounting of the caretakers. But they maliciously treated the second messenger like the first. And this they did as well to the third!

"Finally the owner decided that the situation demanded a strong show of authority. So he sent his own son, saying to himself, 'Surely they will respect my son!'

"But the caretakers gleefully concluded that the way to gain ownership of the vineyard for themselves would be to eliminate the rightful heir, and so they waylaid the son and killed him.

"Such stupid reasoning could only bring its own reward, of course. And indeed the lord of the vineyard came with force, seized those evil men, and destroyed them. Then he gave the care of his vineyard to other and more trustworthy servants."

Silence greeted the ending of the story. The Doctors may have been callous and insincere, but they were not stupid. They knew what He had meant to say. They recognized, within the allegory, their nation, their history, and now their own plans. As unrepentant generations gone by had turned against the prophets they would not hear, so now these plotted the death of One who was more than prophet. He, facing them unafraid, told them in this fashion that their

schemes were known, and that He went to His death according to plan.

"Remember that saying," He demanded, "'The Stone which the builders first rejected finally became the keystone in the arch'? It follows therefore that upon whom that stone shall fall, he shall be ground to powder."

They didn't miss that prediction of His ultimate triumph, and of their ultimate downfall. Never before had He challenged them so directly, or spoken so bluntly. Had they not held themselves in check for fear of the people, His enemies would have killed Him then and there. Instead, they conceded Him the skirmish and left the field, only to send back spies who continued the attack with another round of potentially incriminating questions. One of these had to do with the most explosive issue of the day: Roman taxes.

"Master," the questioner began flatteringly, "we know that you are neither evasive nor partial in your teaching. Tell us: Is it right that we should have to pay tribute to Caesar?"

This time they were sure He could not escape. Whichever way He answered, He would surely condemn Himself—either for sedition or for urging collaboration with the occupation.

But Jesus looked directly at them, calmly assessing the evil intent behind their leering faces. "Why do you keep on testing me?" He asked patiently. "Bring me a coin!"

Someone handed over a penny. Jesus placed it on His palm with its picture of the emperor, which symbolized the order and the justice of Rome, facing upward. "Whose image is on this coin?" He demanded.

"Caesar's!"

"Very well, then. Render unto Caesar the things that are

Caesar's." He paused. "And unto God render the things that are God's."

The Sadducees, politically and theologically left-wingers, fared no better than their conservative colleagues and opponents, the Pharisees. The Sadducees, as the extreme liberal element among the Doctors, held to the ethics and the morality of the law but denied that the law had an otherworldly frame of reference. They could not accept the idea of a Resurrection and Judgment. For them religion exhausted its value in this life. And their questions reflected their views.

"Master," they interrupted Him to ask, "we understand that Moses commanded a surviving brother to take his deceased brother's wife in order that children might be born to perpetuate the memory and name of the dead man. Now this is our problem. We know of a family of seven brothers, the eldest of whom died childless. Obedient to the law, the second brother promptly married the widow in order to do his duty. But he, too, died childless. As a matter of fact, in due time all seven of the brothers had the woman, each of them dying without children. Finally, of course, the woman also died.

"Now this is what we want to know: When the Resurrection occurs, whose wife shall she be?"

No matter what He did with that one (thought the Sadducees) He would end by looking ridiculous.

But Jesus quietly showed them a compelling glimpse of the world they refused to believe in. "In this world," He pointed out, "men and women marry. But those whom God shall make worthy to begin another life will find that birth and death are things of the past. They do not marry in the life to come but rather live as the children of God Himself.

"As to whether or not there is another life," continued the Lord pointedly, "remember that God called Himself in His Revelation the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, long years after those men had died? How could He continue to be the God of men who are dead, if there is no future life as you claim? If God is still the God of Abraham, then Abraham must live!"

In encounters like these, every critic was effectively silenced.

By now it was Tuesday of Passion week, and the days were passing quickly. During the day He went to the temple, to teach. By night, He and the Twelve slipped away into the cool hills near Jerusalem, usually to the Mount of Olives, His favorite retreat. His talks with the apostles became more and more intimate. In the hours snatched away from the crowds, He went into greater detail than ever before, discussing their future. He had never minimized the cost of discipleship: now He spoke frankly of peril and persecution. But He also promised mysteriously to come back after He should go away and to rejoin them in a relationship which He indicated would be more intimate and sustaining than the one they now enjoyed. He also promised an ultimate, tangible coming again, telling them that this would be their Hope, and that they should live constantly in expectation of it.

Now the Doctors quickly noticed that He disappeared at night, and they wondered where He went. If He could be located after He had slipped away to be alone (they reasoned craftily) He might be taken without the people's knowledge. Once in their hands, He could be tried and convicted before public resentment had time to express itself. And if the

governor's permission could be gotten quickly He might even be crucified before the people awoke to what was going on. They had no fear that the outcome of the trial might be contested. They knew the people held the Sanhedrin in too high respect for that and would abide by whatever verdict it obtained through legal means—whether they liked it or not. The important thing was to take Him quietly.

Thus they were delighted when Judas came with his offer of betrayal. Judas, one of the inner Twelve, a trusted companion of three eventful years, was a traitor. The renegade apostle volunteered his services to the Council of Doctors who, in turn, promised him good pay if he would help them arrest Him privately. Judas agreed, and immediately set about making his plans. Almost immediately he found opportunity to carry them out.

You will remember that this week marked the annual celebration of the feast of the Passover. Jesus intended that it should be an especially memorable occasion for the apostles. Accordingly, He called Peter and John aside early the scheduled morning of the Passover meal and gave them detailed instructions for their feast.

"Go into the city," He directed. "As you enter the gate, you will meet a man carrying a pitcher of water. Follow him. The house where he will be going is the house where we will celebrate the Passover together. Say to the owner of the house when you find it, 'The Master wants your guest room for the feast.' He will show you a large, furnished upper room. There, make ready for us."

Peter and John found the house by following the man with the pitcher just as Jesus had said. All that day they spent making everything ready for this remembrance of Israel's midnight flight out of Egypt.

When evening had come and they all were reclining about the table (Judas, too), Jesus made it plain that He wanted this occasion to have a special, new meaning for them. He told them that it would be their last meal together, and He indicated that He meant it to be the first celebration of a new Passover, symbolizing a new deliverance.

That holy night Jesus gave His apostles the holy ordinance we call the Supper of the Lord: which we celebrate not only to provide food and fellowship, but to remind us and seal to our hearts the unity of our spirits with His; to provide nourishment for our souls by a Power beyond ourselves, as the body is renewed by food—remembering always the Death that made the new experience possible.

Taking bread, the Lord held it up in the sight of all before giving thanks, breaking it and then distributing it personally to each, saying as He did so: "Take, eat. This is my body given for you. Do this, in remembrance of me."

Next, taking a wine cup, he held it in His hands and said: "This cup represents my legacy to you—my blood, shed for you and for the remission of sins. Take it and divide it among yourselves."

Gloom hung thick about the table that night. No jest or levity broke the solemnity of that hour which persisted until it was very late. The face of the Lord mirrored an unearthly sadness as He spoke in solemn tones to His closest friends, one of whom would soon betray Him. This time the smell of death hung heavy over the little group. He who knew every awful detail of the Event now beginning, spoke of it frankly to them. He even mentioned the traitorous act of Judas:

"The hand of him who shall betray me lies with mine upon this very table!"

And He warned Peter that he would soon publicly fail

to stand by Him. "I have prayed," He told the protesting fisherman, "that your faith fail not."

To which Simon replied with some asperity, "Lord, I am ready to go both to prison and to death, if I must, to follow you where you are going!"

But the Lord prepared him gently: "Peter, the cock will not crow this very night until you have denied three times that you know me at all!"

After they left that upper room, preceded by Judas who had found an excuse to slip away alone—and with Peter still vehemently protesting his loyalty—Jesus led them out to the Mount of Olives. It was in the early hours before the dawn, for the Passover must be eaten at midnight.

On the Mount of Olives there was a garden, called Gethsemane. Into this garden Jesus and the Eleven went that night. Tired and sleepy, the apostles slumped to the ground; but Jesus went off a little way alone, to pray. Faced with the terrible ordeal ahead, into the significance of which we can hardly look, the Lord that night agonized in His communion with His Father until the sweat poured from His body in great drops of blood.

After a while He came over to where the Eleven were stretched out upon the ground. Gently He awakened them—just as a motley rabble of soldiers, common servants, and slaves clanked noisily into the garden. At their head marched a company of priests and Doctors. All were carrying torches—and weapons. Together they made a fearsome mob, with their faces shining ghostly in the flickering flames of the torches.

In front of all marched Judas.

None of the Eleven doubted for an instant what would follow. Yet, for a moment, they held their ground, standing

bravely by Him. One of them went so far as to draw a sword and single-handed attack the mob with it, cutting off the ear of one of the slaves of the high priest before the Lord stopped him and healed the wounded ear. But then their courage failed them, and they broke and ran, leaving Him alone.

His friends gone, the Master faced His enemies. "Why did you come as though to take a common criminal?" He demanded steadily. "Every day I taught openly in the temple. Why didn't you seize me then?"

His words shamed them. But they laid resolute hands on Him who is untouchable and bound Him who is Freedom itself and led Him quickly to the palace of the high priest. The trial would have to be authorized by the high priest, conducted by the Sanhedrin, and the verdict approved by the representative of Rome. Before day broke, the trial had begun.

Now it was cold in the great stone hall of the high priest's palace, and near one entrance a mixed group of soldiers and slaves kindled a small fire on the stone floor for warmth during the wait until daylight.

Not long after it began to burn, a skulking figure materialized out of the darkness and quietly joined the group warming themselves. Peter had to see what they would do with his Lord. But if he hoped to remain unrecognized, his hope was short-lived. A servant girl standing there glanced at him and then recognized him. "There stands one of His disciples!" she whispered loudly to those standing by.

Simon heard—and quailed. He wasn't exactly afraid, but he didn't relish the thought of being arrested—not now. And so, because he didn't really think it mattered what he said to a slave, the fisherman retorted sharply, "Woman, I don't know Him!"

But after a little while someone else who thought he remembered seeing this man in the company of Jesus, came over to ask curiously, "Aren't you one of His disciples?"

"I am not!" heatedly retorted the apostle.

Satisfied, they left him alone. But about an hour later a newcomer passed the fire: one who had seen Peter too often to make an error. Somewhat surprised to see him now standing alone in that place, he asked one of the soldiers in a half-whisper what he was doing there.

"You must be mistaken," replied the soldier. "He says he doesn't know the prisoner."

"No mistake," snapped the newcomer. "I have seen him with the others too often to be mistaken. Why, anyone can see at once that he is a Galilean!"

This time swearing his denial, Peter replied with an oath, "Man, you don't know what you are saying!"

But while the words were still in his throat and the flush on his face, there floated into the hall the unmistakable sound of a cock, crowing the hour before daybreak. At the sound, Simon caught himself with a gasp and turned to find the eyes of Jesus fixed upon him from the far end of the hall. White-faced, Peter stumbled out into the darkness, weeping bitterly.

Meanwhile, the brutal, sadistic mercenaries of the high priest were having their fun. They beat Him with their sword scabbards and with their belts. They spit at Him in the oriental's gesture of supreme contempt. They blindfolded Him, then struck Him in the face, howling with glee, "Who struck you, Prophet?" screaming with hysterical derision in the face of His patient silence.

They kept up the abuse until the Sanhedrin finally assembled with all its pomp and pageantry. Each member had been summoned by special messenger from his Passover celebra-

tion or routed from bed. Once duly constituted, the Sanhedrin made short work of its business.

"Do you dare call yourself the Christ?" demanded the high priest. It didn't matter that evidence existed in abundance of His right to the title. They would take His very credentials and use them to convict Him.

But not even that would be necessary if they could get Him to make the blasphemous claim with His own mouth. And He more than satisfied them:

"Hereafter," he announced calmly but in a voice that was heard in every corner of the hall, "shall the Son of Man sit at the right hand of the power of God!"

"Are you, then, the Son of God?"

"I Am!" The words of the divine Title came dramatically and with great dignity.

Those words threw the assembly into a bedlam of sound. "Why should we need witnesses!" screamed the high priest above the turmoil. "He has condemned Himself with His own mouth!"

Like a mob they rushed the soldiers guarding Him to one side and seized Him with their own official hands. Jostling Him roughly, they pushed and shoved Him out of the council hall, on their raging way to the palace of the governor, Pilate. Without authority of their own to pass a capital sentence, they must get Rome's approval before He could be put to death.

But Pilate at first refused to grant the necessary approval. To every charge—from treason and sedition to blasphemy—he shook his head. The governor talked with the prisoner, and the encounter left him unaccountably uneasy. "I find no fault in Him," he insisted. "I will not sign His death warrant!"

"But He has done nothing but incite the people to rebellion since first He began to teach in Galilee!" argued His accusers.

The word "Galilee" suddenly suggested, to Pilate, a way out. Herod, Tetrarch of Galilee, was in Jerusalem at that very time. As a Galilean, there would be nothing wrong in having the man tried before His own governor. Vastly relieved, Pilate ordered Him taken to Herod.

But Herod gave His accusers no more satisfaction than Pilate. Curiosity had long made him want to see Jesus. Perhaps the Teacher would work a miracle for his benefit. But he most certainly wanted no part in the death of another prophet. The uneasy nights he had spent since the beheading of the Baptizer had been enough. Accordingly, when Jesus stood mute before him, refusing to answer every question, he quickly excused himself from any part in the proceedings and sent Him back to Pilate with an ingratiating note (which incidentally reconciled these two who had been enemies a long while). But first he let his soldiers knock Him about a bit and dress Him in a mocking purple robe—just for having called him a "fox" one time.

By now thoroughly uneasy, Pilate did his best to dissuade the Jewish leaders from their purpose. He offered to punish Him by lashing or in any other way short of death. But they would have none of it and screamed in chorus like wild beasts:

"Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

Casting about for anything that might avert what he by then had come to believe would be a tragedy, Pilate had a happy thought. It had been the custom for the governor, during the Passover season, to release some convicted political prisoner in a gesture of good will toward the Jews. Guilty or

not, this was his chance to release Jesus. But when the governor announced his intention the mob screamed again:

"No! If you must, release Barabbas! We want Barabbas! Away with this man!"

Now this Barabbas, a notorious robber, was awaiting execution for sedition and murder.

Once more Pilate argued with them. "I find no fault in this man," he insisted. "I therefore will lash Him and release Him."

But they only became all the more violent, and finally Pilate capitulated to their will. To let the high priest and the mob have their way, he issued the official order of execution and released, instead of the Lord, the criminal; but, in a face-saving gesture, he washed his hands publicly of the whole affair.

As the soldiers led Jesus away, they stopped a Cyrenian named Simon, who was coming into the city early in the morning, and forced him to carry the cross upon which He would die.

Two others were pulled from their cells and dragged away to keep Him company: criminals already condemned, who awaited only the next public day of execution.

Outside the city, on the crest of a rounded knob known for its macabre role as the Place of the Skull, they crucified Him and, together with Him, the two criminals: setting His cross in the center and theirs on either side.

As the heavy wood thudded into its socket, the Lord exclaimed softly, in all the pain of nail-torn flesh: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!"

Unperturbed, the soldiers knelt there in the dust and gambled for His clothing.

When He called for something to drink they put a vinegar-

filled sponge on the end of a long reed and raised it to His parched lips.

And they ridiculed Him. Above His head they nailed a sign to the wood which read, in Greek and Latin and Hebrew: "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS."

His enemies, who at last had succeeded for a while, now joined in jeering at Him without fear, screaming insults with the smug satisfaction of cruel men who have triumphed and now at last hold a mortal enemy at their mercy.

"You claimed to save others," they taunted. "Now let's see you save yourself!" Shouting their derision, they cried, "If you are indeed the Christ of God, come down from the cross!"

One of the criminals, despite his great agony, added his taunts to the clamor: "Save us," he gasped, "if you can!"

But the other, struck by the injustice of the deed committed by the Jews that day—having, perhaps, listened to a discourse upon some earlier and happier Galilean hill—rebuked his partner in crime.

"We were condemned fairly. Our punishment fits the crime. But this man did nothing wrong!" Twisting his head to look full at the center cross, he begged with the frightened cry of a child, "Remember me, Lord, when you pass into your Kingdom!"

And in reply he heard a reassuring voice say, "Truly I tell you, this very day you will be with me in Paradise!"

That day of crucifixion was a day of terror, of loneliness, and of suffering. It also was a day memorable for the way both heaven and earth rebelled at the inhuman drama being carried to its cosmic finish from the bare knoll called the Place of the Skull. The cross had been reared against the sky about midmorning. By high noon, a black gloom, darker

than that of any storm-blackened sky, settled over the land, as the sun disappeared from view in the morning heavens. For three full hours the eerie blotting out of daylight continued, until He surrendered His spirit.

But the darkness was not the only sign that day. Frightened priests, on duty at the temple, froze as the ground beneath them shook and the huge, woven curtain sealing off the unapproachable Holy of Holies from the rest of the inner Sanctuary, suddenly split from top to bottom as though invisible hands had ripped open the seal to the very Presence Itself.

And over the whole area the air hung motionless, like a heavy, smothering blanket, intolerable with gloom.

By the middle of the dark afternoon, it was all over. His dying cry, by a superhuman effort, rang out so loud that even those who watched from a distance heard the words of His surrender:

"Father," He cried, "into Thy hands I commend my Spirit!" And, dropping His head, He died.

At the foot of the cross the centurion in charge, profoundly agitated, was heard to exclaim, "Surely this was a good man!" While many who earlier had hurled insults and gibes at the center cross, now hurried fearfully home, their hearts quaking for they knew not what.

Among those standing by during His final moments was a Pharisee named Joseph, of the city of Arimathea. He had not taken part in the trial, or added his voice to the verdict, for he secretly counted himself a disciple. When he saw that the Lord had died an inner manliness, which before had been too weak, began to show. Boldly, he went to Pilate and requested His body. Then, with the governor's permission and the help of some disciples, Joseph tenderly took the body of

Jesus from the cross, wrapped it in linen, and laid it in his own new sepulcher. The place of burial was a cave, hewn from solid rock, sealed with a round slab of stone rolled across the entrance.

That last act of respect was hurriedly done, for the sun slanted low in the sky and the Sabbath, which began at sunset, was near. No time remained for even the simple embalming rites of the poor, and the women, disappointed, saw the huge stone roll into place, promising themselves they would come back the very first thing the third day hence.

The second act of history's cosmic drama had been played to its end. Unaware and uncaring, the rest of the world waited—and slept.

VIII

The Way of a Burning Heart

In the dim morning light, the guard at the city gate hardly gave them a second glance as they padded softly through the gate and out along the path that wound around outcroppings of rock to the northeast of the city proper. There was nothing about them to deserve the guard's closer scrutiny: just a small group of plainly dressed women leaving the city before the streets began to teem with the morning crowds.

Had the guard looked more closely, he might have noticed that their eyes were downcast and red from much weeping; that they walked stiffly on leaden feet and as though gripped with profound shock; that each carefully held a small bundle, and that the fragrance of rich spices lingered in the air after they passed.

It was the morning of the third day of utter defeat. Mary of Magdala, Mary the mother of James, Joanna, and one or two others were going to the tomb to perform final embalming rites upon the body of Jesus. They had not come the day before because it had been the Sabbath.

They were not even remotely prepared to find the tomb empty. Their heavy hearts had been wholly drained of any emotion but despair. If they had any feeling at all, it was of total loss and futility. The ecstatic and holy days of their

devotion to One whose power no man could overcome had now become incoherent fragments of a nightmare impossible to forget. Their thoughts weighed them down with intolerable discomfort as old, familiar feelings of loneliness and fear once again returned to dominate their minds and hearts. The future, which just a short while before had looked so bright with hope, now once again loomed gloomy and forbidding, with all its frightening aspects of the uncertain and the unknown.

Like all the others, they had failed to profit by the Lord's efforts to prepare them for the darkness through which they were now passing and the bitterness of the cup which they, too, drank before the coming of the new day and of the Presence which would replace life's old face with a new one. To be sure, they had the memory of His teachings; but they had had the substance of the law's ethics before He had come. Now His promises seemed empty and meaningless.

Not even the sight of the empty cave, gaping darkly from its recess in the rocky hillside, with its heavy door lying to one side upon the ground, disturbed the gloom hanging over them. If anything, the sight of the vacant sepulcher simply added to the crushing weight of their emotional burden.

But as the women stared distractedly into the gaping hole in the hillside, the sound of a voice drew their attention. Turning, they saw two men standing close by. For the first time since the awful Event, their hearts began to stir strangely within them as they used to stir when He spoke to them. And gradually they began really to hear the words which these heavenly visitors were speaking.

"What brought you here?" one of them was demanding. "Why did you expect to find Him in the tomb? Don't you recall that He promised He would rise from the dead the

third day? Have you forgotten that He told you He would die, but that His death would mark the beginning, not the end, of your perfect happiness with Him?

"He is not dead; He is risen!"

Somehow the announcement smote the women with the conviction of certainty, piercing and shattering the gloom and misery weighing them down. Had they been asked what His Resurrection would mean, they could not have answered, for they did not know; but now they believed it had happened, and at once their sorrow fled. Babbling happily, they hurried back into the city. Straight to the apostles they flew, and reported breathlessly what they had heard.

But the women could not duplicate the ring of conviction which had stirred their own hearts, and the disciples refused to believe. It was too much to credit their report that the Lord had risen, alive, from the dead. Had the disciples expected it, they might have believed. But they had not. Doubtful, but excited, they discussed it back and forth. One or two (notably Peter) rushed out to view the tomb, returning to report that it was indeed empty. But how could He be alive, they asked one another, and what could it possibly mean, if true? In what way, they wondered, would His return change the way things had been before (provided, of course, He *had* come back)?

That same day, two of the disciples left Jerusalem for their home in the village of Emmaus, a short distance away. Their grief continued heavy as they walked along the road, discussing the dark days just past and the incredible report of the morning. They could not believe that the women knew what they were talking about. But neither could they imagine what possible effect it could have, if the report *was* true. Granted that the Lord had canceled out the possibility of an

earthly Kingdom, through His preaching of a more vital communion with God, it was a mystery how His coming back to be with them again could possibly effect such a communion.

But while they were talking about these things in low tones, almost as if someone might overhear, Jesus Himself appeared on the road and fell in with them. Neither was permitted to recognize Him, and they rather wished that this stranger, who had appeared from practically nowhere, had not interrupted their conversation. Finally the Lord broke the silence:

"What were you talking about when I joined you?" He asked directly.

"Last week's events," one of them, named Cleopas, replied curtly without turning his head.

"What events?"

At that they looked at Him with astonishment. Surely everyone within a day's journey of Jerusalem knew what had happened over the week end! Gravely they told Him of the Crucifixion and then of the incredible tale the women had brought that very morning. "We had hoped that it had been He who would redeem Israel!" they concluded hopelessly.

Now it was the stranger's turn. Gently, skillfully, He began to unfold the meaning of the sacred Scriptures. With a tone of authority that stirred their hearts curiously, as the women had been stirred, the Lord took them back through the prophecies, pointing out that suffering and death had been connected, in many instances, with predictions about the coming Messiah. The rest of the way into Emmaus, He explained the ancient writings as they applied to Himself. But the biggest question remained unanswered: What did it all add up to, from here on out?

They were still talking when they came to their destination and the two disciples turned to go in. Because it was late in the day, they invited the unrecognized fellow traveler to accept their hospitality. He accepted, and at the supper table He made Himself known. In words and with gestures that opened their eyes as they recalled other blessings, He returned thanks—and they knew Him; but before they could utter a word He vanished from their sight, leaving them staring speechless at His vacant couch.

Cleopas broke the pregnant silence. "Didn't you feel your heart burning as He interpreted the Scriptures to us by the way?" he cried.

The other disciple did not answer. But he recalled that he had, indeed, felt that sensation of discomfort which Cleopas had called a burning heart.

Terribly excited, but perplexed, they left the food on the table untouched and hurried back through the gathering gloom to Jerusalem. There they found the apostles in the middle of a larger crowd of disciples, everyone babbling to his neighbor with the same excitement. Peter, too, claimed to have seen the Lord and to have talked briefly with Him after the moment of recognition! Cleopas and his friend recounted their experience with relish to men who by now vacillated between doubt and an eager wish to believe. Most of them were not yet willing to admit that they believed the stories, but virtually all by now could recall some occasion when Jesus had referred to some sort of climax beyond His expected death. Some insisted that He had spoken of rising again the third day, while at least one apostle recalled that He once had mentioned the prophet Jonah's three days in the fish's belly as a sign to be remembered.

Abruptly the babble of voices stopped. Unannounced, His

manner of entrance a mystery, the Lord stood before them. His sudden appearance in the room was so dramatic that it brought fear instead of joy to their faces. But the familiar voice reassured them.

"Do not be afraid," He said. "It is indeed I. Handle me, if you wish, to see that it is not a spirit.

"Have you any food?"

Someone had brought a broiled fish and part of a honeycomb in a lunch basket. Quickly it was pushed forward, and He took it and ate while they all stood around watching, still too afraid to speak. And then He began to talk.

Everything written about Him in the Scriptures must be fulfilled, He explained. This had now been done. All the ancient writings had related, in some way, human evil, human suffering, and sin's supreme aftercome, death, to the coming of the Messiah. To the end that something effective and final might be done about man's Testament in Evil, He had been promised, had come, had died, and now had come again from the dead. Into the terror and loneliness and anguish of the Pit from which no man ever returned, He had gone, voluntarily: necessarily alone, necessarily forsaken—but only to come back, a victor! The thing which punishes had not punished Him; the thing which overcomes had not conquered Him; the point of no return had been a place from which He returned: in order that those who henceforth would become infected with the efficacious immunity of His Presence might live and never die.

Quietly, persuasively, speaking now to hearts prepared to begin to understand, He explained how they would live because He lived, how their heritage of weakness would soon be supplanted by His Testament of Power. His Kingdom, of which they were the first living signs, soon would grow and

spread: an everlasting dominion in the hearts of men, planted there by these into whose hands He shortly would entrust the Program.

"You will be my witnesses," He ordered, "after you have received the Power from on high. Beginning at Jerusalem and then to all nations, you will tell why and how by repentance there shall be forgiveness of sins."

Evidently, from the way He spoke on that occasion and later, they were not yet ready to start out.

After His resurrection, the Lord did not continue with them in an unbroken fellowship as before. Now He came and went, appearing to different disciples and in different places for a period of some forty days.

Finally, one afternoon, He led some of them out of Jerusalem onto a hillside near Bethany, for the last time. There, as He talked with them of their new-found understanding and their coming mission, the inevitable question came up of the future of Israel: a troubled, occupied nation, so long under the yoke of succeeding masters that the dream of greatness and world-wide dominion which the Jews read into their ancient, covenant promises now seemed farther away than ever.

"Will you now restore Israel to power?"

It was not a foolish question. They still had no clear idea how to relate the first part of the Event, together with the returned Christ, to a Program which seemed to have as its object little more than what He had sought to do throughout the three years of His ministry. With the dramatic climax of the whole Event yet ahead, small wonder they caught themselves returning to the old, unanswered questions in an effort to understand. Could anything further happen that would add to the significance of their relationship with Him,

or increase their sensitivity to the vast gulf between the two worlds that had come together in Him, or stimulate their responsiveness beyond their present willingness to give all or go anywhere for Him?

He, with that infinite patience of His, answered their eager questions kindly but still in a manner not entirely satisfying. It was not for them to know the times or the seasons. In some respects the future course of the Kingdom would remain undefined—and political considerations were definitely out. After receiving Power they would begin their primary task of witnessing, testifying to what they had seen and heard, and to what they knew to be the authentic Truth of God. Beginning in Jerusalem, the effect of their testimony would spread to Judea, to Samaria, and ultimately throughout the most distant parts of the earth.

When He had finished what He wanted to say, there on the hillside near Bethany, He blessed them with outstretched hands. And while He blessed them He was taken up out of their sight, vanishing before their eyes into a cloud. For a long minute they stood gaping, until they heard a voice calling to them. Turning, they saw two personages standing on the hilltop.

"Men of Galilee! Accept the fact that the time of visitation is over! Now return to Jerusalem as He commanded. This Jesus has not gone for all time. Just as you now saw Him go, so one day He will return!"

Still uncomprehending but now less inclined to question, and strangely content, the disciples made their way back to the capital city. Dominating their feelings was that awe-inspired reverence men sometimes feel when they begin to realize they have stood face to face with God. All along, they had known that He represented Deity in some special sense;

but only after the Resurrection had they found themselves prone to an attitude of worship when in His presence. The religious veneration which they had associated with the temple and its sacrificial ritual, they now unhesitatingly transferred to Him. Before His ascension they had been satisfied with Him as an object of adoration. And now they were prepared to go beyond that and relate all that was good and ultimately real to this One who was gone, but who had promised, before He left, that they would not remain alone.

One thing continued missing: the link between their gracious God and exalted Lord, and helpless man still wallowing in the despair of things done that he ought not to have done and things left undone that he ought to have done. Their intimate association with Holiness had not yet provided a way to attain holiness: they had known the law before He came. His triumph over evil and death, which they had shared as spectators, had not yet brought any feeling of triumph in their own mortal conflict with evil. To the contrary: they felt much the same as before they had become eye-witnesses of Heaven's cosmic struggle and victory.

Live as He had lived? But how? Follow His teachings? But He had taught that man needed help—needed Him—and then He had gone away. Moreover, His teachings had not been well received when they came from His own lips: let alone from His simple followers.

He had said they would be witnesses. Witnesses to the fact that He had been a prophet? Everyone knew that. That He had died? Thousands had seen Him hanging on the cross. That He had risen from the dead—that He was the Son of God? Perhaps. But what benefit would come from knowing that? Should they tell that they had seen Him exalted? What of it except the confusion and fear which would follow

among those who thought they had destroyed Him—if they believed it?

On the other hand, these disciples had also been told directly to wait. So they bided their time, pondered their instructions, passed much time in prayer—and waited. Altogether, some hundred and twenty men and women made up the closely knit fellowship of those who waited and prayed for guidance. Conspicuous among them (besides the apostles) were Mary, the Lord's mother, and His brothers, who until after the Resurrection had not been disciples.

During this period of waiting they found that one administrative matter claimed their attention. The death of Judas—as Peter reminded them—had left a gap in the ranks of the twelve apostles. Judas had vanished into the black night after his kiss of betrayal, to stumble hysterically to a lonely tree. There he hanged himself, badly and ignominiously. Afterward he had become the first to lie in a field bought with his blood money for the burial of strangers and paupers. The disciples agreed that his place should not be left vacant. Accordingly, they selected two from among those who could give firsthand testimony of all the things they wished to remember from the very start: Matthias and Barsabas. After earnest prayer, they cast their lots, and Matthias was thereafter numbered with the Twelve.

At this time the Jewish feast of the Pentecost (of the Passover-plus-fifty-days) lay just ahead. Although they did not know it, the time of preparation had been accomplished. The last act of the Event was about to begin. Within a matter of hours their perplexities would be resolved, their questions answered, their deficiencies met, their weaknesses overcome: all through the work of true religion, disclosed in the gift of the Presence.

On the very day of the feast it happened. The disciples were assembled together, as usual, for prayer, when suddenly the hall trembled at a rushing sound like that made by a strong wind. Overhead, the air in the room flickered with small, visible tongues as of flame that hovered with a distant singing sound and then seemed to settle upon each head. In that final instant of contact, each person sensed a Presence coming to him alone, in a private, overwhelming intimacy which at the same time embraced them all in such a living fusion of identities and wills that the tight little world of self seemed for each to break and crumble down.

Each felt himself created anew by this drenching effect of a covering Presence. Each felt the piercing thrust of a Personality which flung about Him, as it were, with a scourge of spiritual cords within the heart, driving out inner malignancies and evil. Then followed a blinding sense of fusion, accomplished when each hurt heart, healed and joined with its neighbor in a living, cosmic graft, became a part of Him and thus of the others—and the Church was born.

With the Presence came the answer to their dreams and their perplexities. Theirs was an experience anticipated by Cleopas and his friend on the road to Emmaus when they felt that sensation of discomfort they had called a burning heart. It was Power they had received: living, efficacious, cleansing, ruling Power, that could do for them everything Christ had promised He would do. With life now characterized by strength instead of weakness, the Lord's repeated insistence that man stands impotent in his own power, needing help from above, suddenly began to make sense.

Religion suddenly took on an entirely new aspect. No longer a priest-mediated, fearful approach by man through gifts and sacrifices to a distant and aloof Deity, the Promise

offered man the intimacy of a personal relation: the presence of a Power greater than himself, to become the controlling principle in life. In the offer so dramatically made to him of the Spirit of God, man received, so to speak, a blank check upon Love itself. And the religious life henceforth would be defined as a disordered life rendered coherent from Above.

Because of the Gift bestowed that day of Pentecost, the Spirit-filled heart thereafter would be the criterion of the Christ-centered life. From that day forward a disciple would be any person whose heart had been put to the torch by a flaming Presence. And the Gospel would be the Good News of a Way: the Way of a burning heart to successful living.

Reduced to its essentials, the message of Pentecost was: since the Lord had died and risen again, God was pleased to dwell in the inner life of men to make possible an existence "in Christ" now, and death but a transition to something better. From that day to this and until the end of time, the Gospel promises that Eternity has humbled Itself to become personal to anyone who, willing to believe, asks for help.

Since that first Pentecost, the coming of the Presence has ordinarily been without outward demonstration. But on that memorable day, the Breath of the Almighty moved upon the disciples to convey His Word in a spectacular fashion. Together with the internal sensations of forgiveness, release, companionship, and power, the Presence brought the miracle of tongues, so that each disciple found his speech issuing coherently in a language other than his own.

That day, devout foreigners come to Jerusalem from every nation and province in the Roman empire heard these unlettered Galileans praising God in languages and dialects native to themselves. Some, to be sure, scoffed at the miracle which testified to the universal character of the Message.

They charged the disciples with being drunk. But hundreds who heard and who understood found, by faith, that the Call was to them too.

For the disciples, the suspenseful period of waiting had ended. The time for action had come. As the Lord had left the banks of the Jordan baptized by the Presence, so they left that upper room commissioned for service. And now they knew what they must both do and say.

Still praising God with the reflected glory of the Visitation upon their faces, they made their way from the house to the temple. Curious and excited people, attracted by the unwonted babble of tongues, followed the little band. When they came to the temple courtyard, always crowded with worshipers but especially so on feast days, the little procession created a sensation. At the foot of the great stone steps leading onto Solomon's porch, the disciples stopped. Peter mounted the steps, then turned so as to face the sea of curious faces. Raising his hand for silence, he began to speak.

"People of Israel," he began in clear, ringing tones, "today and in us you see the heaven-sent fulfillment of prophecy. The long-awaited day of the Lord has come! It is here: not in a political liberation, but in the outpouring of the Spirit of God just as He was promised centuries ago in the prophecy of Joel.

"Men of Israel, listen to me! Jesus, of Nazareth, whom you knew, who walked among you accredited by God in the miracles you saw Him work as well as the many other signs and wonders I am sure you remember;

"This Jesus of Nazareth, I say, whom you turned against, seized, and killed, is not dead! He rose from the dead! We who stand before you today saw Him. We talked with Him.

We watched as, at the last, He ascended in glory. Men and brethren, I am telling you the truth:

"He is not dead. He is alive! And today, fulfilling the promise He made us before He went away, He has visited us with His Spirit, with the result you can see with your own eyes. If you will accept it, these tongues are a demonstration that what I say is true. This Jesus, whom you crucified, is both Christ and King. You crucified your Lord!"

Peter's scathing indictment fell on hundreds—thousands—of receptive ears. Most of the people in his audience had been in a state of restless disquiet anyhow, living uneasily in their memory of the hysterical mob which had swept Him out of the city to the Place of the Skull. The words of the apostle fell on their ears like strokes of doom. And in an instant they were clamoring for mercy, begging to be told what they could do.

That day Peter had delivered Christianity's first sermon. And the waiting world heard the Gospel:

"To you there is offered forgiveness: pardon. For you, if you will have it, there awaits the prospect of free acceptance before God and newness of life from God. All this, and more, too, is available if you will receive Him as you have seen Him in us.

"For the promise is to you and to your children and to all who are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call."

IX

The Program

What the venerable city of Jerusalem saw and heard that memorable day of Pentecost was utterly without precedent in the history of religion. Nothing like it had ever been contemplated by man, even in his wildest dreams of gods and demons and familiar spirits—or even in his most reverent study of the law and the prophets and the traditions of the devout elders.

Virtually everyone agreed that men sometimes became agents of Evil. No one doubted, even in those days, the possibility of demon-possession with all its fearful consequences of men and women tortured by insane strength, wild delirium, grotesque features, and the power to summon specters and fiends from the black pit.

But that man might be possessed by Goodness and thus acquire righteousness and charity had not occurred to anyone. Especially remote from the average mind was the thought that the state of being Goodness-possessed might lie at the heart of true religion. Yet this, in essence, was the chief benefit resulting from the Messiah's coming, and it would shortly become the unifying principle within the Messianic Kingdom. The fantastic possibility had become actuality in the vivid demonstration of tongues. Moreover, what Peter

offered his hearers in Christianity's first evangelical sermon was only the extension of that possibility into every life wanting it badly enough to fulfill the conditions for receiving it.

Before Christ, the Deity had been conceived as remote, separated from man by a gulf of man's own making which man could not bridge; approachable only through religious specialists especially ordained to their privilege. Now, however, having invaded the province of evil and neutralized the curse, He indicated His willingness to dwell in gracious intimacy with these, His erstwhile creatures of destruction, by calling them to share Himself. From henceforth, men would have, in the Power available, the long-sought *dynamic* of successful living.

Peter's impassioned appeal galvanized his audience. It is hardly possible, of course, that either the apostle or his hearers fully realized all the implications of the "new" religion. But they had now seen its effects, and they reached the conclusion that, whatever it meant, this they needed: if only to escape the crushing sense of judgment brought by the apostle's scathing indictment. They had crucified their King!

Consequently, in response to the invitation, they came forward in droves to signify their willingness to be changed. And before they stopped coming, some three thousand persons had received Christian baptism, in a thrilling demonstration of the work of Grace.

Almost immediately, the effects of this new Power began to appear in definite and distinctive patterns of behavior. The men and women affected began to show, during the days that followed Pentecost, that fundamental personality changes took place in the course of a spiritual rebirth.

Nagging fears and phobias vanished. The frantic, animal anxieties of life became replaced with warm, secure feelings of trust and hope. Peace of mind seemed to come without a struggle in the new consciousness that life was now lived in the strength of Another because life now belonged wholly to Him.

For most of them, the constant, reassuring sense of the presence of God became the most real thing in all the world.

Eagerly they sought out one another's company, hungry to be together. More time than they had ever devoted to religion, they now passed in prayer and spiritual exercises.

A strong community spirit materialized out of the strange new feeling of kinship they all had. Within the new community a selfless concern for others' needs appeared. Their relationship became that of men and women whose happiness unaccountably seemed to depend on others' welfare instead of their own: they were satisfied only when, through sacrifice, they had done something for one another.

An intimate, family term, "brother," came into ordinary use, because it seemed to be the most natural thing in the world to think of fellow participants in the grace of Power as brethren. To be sure they were brethren: brethren in Christ.

At first no definite organization characterized the Way. The apostles, of course, were recognized leaders, but all shared in the feeling of community obligation. No one had to tell them to spread the Program. Each, whenever he could, did his part in telling the Good News: that the Lord was risen; that a Power could be had, bringing peace now and the certain hope of a life triumphant beyond the grave. The conditions laid down were simple: recognize and acknowledge your need; commit yourself into the hands of this

Power greater than yourself, determined to preserve the new life which begins almost automatically, with frequent devotional exercises, fellowship, and service. Men and women who agreed to the conditions were, of course, baptized.

In those early days God confirmed His Gospel in many and strange ways. As the Program got under way He permitted the apostles to present many credentials of the kind that had been signs of the Lord's authority: miracles. These miracles were powerful, convincing, supernatural testimonies to the message.

There was the case of the lame man at the gate of the temple, for instance:

Not long after Pentecost, Peter and John went up to the temple one afternoon at the crowded hour of prayer. They had no special plans for the day, except to speak to any who would listen to their Good News. Now at the gate of the temple sat a cripple who, for many years, had been a beggar. All day long he would accost worshipers with his plaintive cry. Not many, going to perform their prescribed devotions, passed without dropping something into his earthen bowl. Over the years he had become a familiar sight in Jerusalem.

When Peter and John came along this day, the cripple raised his bowl expectantly:

"An alms, for the love of Jehovah!"

Peter glanced his way, then stopped, for a strange compulsion had seized him. With an unfamiliar feeling of confidence, he strode over to the emaciated figure against the great stone gate, took him by the hand, and announced in a clear, ringing voice:

"Silver or gold have I none. But what I have you may have too. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk!"

For an instant, nothing moved. Then the man began to struggle to his feet. Standing, he clung to Peter while tears streamed from his eyes. Together, these two went into the temple courtyard, the former cripple leaping and shouting his joy. Most of the worshipers, dumfounded by the incredible sight, crowded around the trio.

And there, for the second time, Peter faced a throng of people from the stone steps of the temple. Before, he had spoken to their curiosity about the display of strange speech. This time he spoke to their amazement at the sight of the former cripple. The substance of the message was much the same:

"People of Israel! Not we, but He whom you crucified has made this man well. The God of our fathers visited His people in the person of His Son, Jesus, the Teacher of Nazareth. You knew Him. Today, though you helped kill Him, He is not dead but living and working through us, His disciples, by the Power we have received to turn men from evil and bring them to newness of life!

"Now we realize that what you did must needs have been done. It was foretold by the prophets and somehow occurred as a necessary part of the divine plan. That, of course, does not excuse you, but it does offer you hope. For God is merciful and ready to forgive. You, too, will receive His Presence if you will turn to Him sincerely repenting and trusting in Him whom you thought you destroyed."

This time the results were more sensational than the first. Nearly five thousand people responded to Peter's invitation.

But some who had heard the message did not. On the fringes of the crowd congregated a few Doctors, lawyers, and priests. They had consistently refused to heed the Lord.

They were not impressed by Peter's invitation. They viewed the apostle's success with grave alarm. Their kind would be impressed by the power of the fisherman's new-found oratory, but not by his message. Instead of meeting, in the Gospel, a way of salvation, they would find only a threat to their tight little order.

Watching, now, as Peter and John taught in the temple courtyard, they decided to take immediate action. Calling the temple guard, the Doctors ordered the two men arrested. Then they convened the Council (or the lesser Sanhedrín) to decide what to do with them.

What had happened, the Doctors decided, represented something new. But after discussing the matter for some time in the Council they could not agree on what to do. The beggar *had* been cured. That much, no one could dispute. But these Galileans were connecting the miracle with the dead Teacher who they claimed was not dead at all but very much alive!

They must be stopped before the populace became too infested with their followers. The sort of raving heard today would be harmless if no one listened, but it could cause a great deal of trouble if the people continued to hear them sympathetically. Why, the rabble might conceivably make a martyr of the Nazarene and blame them, their own rulers, for His death!

Uncertain how to handle the two apostles, the Council finally decided to let them go, with a stern warning not to start any trouble on account of the Nazarene.

"This is your first warning," threatened Ananias the high priest, "and I expect it to be the last one necessary. If you continue to plant your ideas in the minds of the people, you will be severely punished."

Thus opposition continued to walk hand in hand with success, and the Way made enemies as well as a great many friends. Those who had seen the Lord's credentials and then put Him to death, now viewed the credentials of His followers and plotted to dispose of them. Human depravity, in addition to being dangerous, is incredibly stupid!

(When this happened under the Gospel's preaching in our own land, it should not be incredible that in your own country, Theophilus, men stand in jeopardy of their lives for believing!)

A short time later a new fact came out about the Way: that it cannot be trifled with. Now it is no small thing in the sight of God to be a hypocrite. This some found out to their sorrow, and they were made an example to all who might follow: an example of hypocrisy's ultimate fate.

One of the results of the Power received through commitment had been that the believers lost their human, frantic concern for material security. No longer did they covet stores of wealth or possessions. And when this noninterest in things material combined with the new feeling of brotherhood which characterized the new community, it became an ordinary matter to see believers selling off their possessions and turning the money over to the apostles for the relief of their less fortunate brethren. In point of fact, a large number of disciples sold everything they had and placed the proceeds in the common fund.

But it also appeared that among the true there walked the false. Some had joined the Way who had no real part with the disciples: for there were faithless ones among the faithful, a few who had not been able to resist the temptation to take advantage of that flood of liberality prompted by love.

Unprincipled parasites, however, soon found they played

a dangerous game when they tempted Providence. One of these, Ananias by name, together with his wife, Sapphira, made a bid for apostolic favor by contributing a sum of money to the Program, falsely claiming it was the total they had received for the farm which they had sold. The man came to Peter one day, interrupting a meeting of the apostle with a class of new converts. Striding in, he dropped a bag of coins on the table with a flourish.

"There is the price of my property!" he announced loftily. "I want to place it all in the public treasury!"

Others had done what Ananias claimed to be doing. And by common agreement those who deliberately impoverished themselves out of their love for the Lord, or who devoted their full time to the Way, were not allowed to suffer by lack of food or shelter for their sacrifice. It was this gratuitous maintenance that Ananias coveted. With the greater part of his profit safely hidden, he could live comfortably, and still have his security. Little did he realize how greatly he presumed.

Peter looked at him intently. "Why have you tried to tempt the Holy Spirit?" he demanded accusingly. "You haven't lied to me, but to God!"

With that judgment passed upon him, Ananias reeled backward and fell to the floor, dead. Peter gave a curt order. Several young men stepped forward and silently lifted the inert figure. As the group about the door gave way, the young men carried the hypocrite away and buried him. And the disciples had a new concept of the seriousness of the profession they had made.

But this wasn't the end of the incident. Some three hours later, the meeting was again interrupted by the entrance of Sapphira.

"My husband was supposed to have come here with the money from our property," she announced importantly. "Have you seen him?"

"Tell me, woman," Peter countered warningly, "for how much did you sell your land?"

The woman named the amount which her husband had thrown upon the table.

"And is that total the amount you wish to give to the Church?"

"It is," she replied, convicted by her own words as a party to the fraud.

Simon Peter pointed a long, calloused finger at her. "Why did you and your husband think you could deceive the Spirit of God? You did us no harm, but you have belittled the Almighty!"

As he spoke, the volunteers who had carried out Ananias fled back into the room. "These men," said the apostle, "have just buried your husband. They will carry you out too!"

No sooner had he spoken the sentence than the woman crumpled to the floor, also dead. Silently and a little fearfully, the spectators watched as she, too, was carried out.

Swiftly the news of the spectacular judgment spread throughout Jerusalem. It made some afraid. Upon the Church as a whole it descended with a profound sobering effect. But it also seemed to act like a stimulant to the Program, and the number of believers soared.

As had been expected, persecution broke out. But persecution only seemed to bind the believers more firmly to their purpose. As a matter of fact, the outbreak of persecution did the Church a service, in that it drove many believers out of Jerusalem to other cities, where they spread the Gospel. In

the capital city itself, moreover, persecution, instead of slowing the Way, seemed to make it more popular. The Lord had not escaped suffering. His followers seemed to think they should not expect to be treated with greater courtesy.

Not long after the incident in the temple, following which Peter and John had been released, the authorities struck. They had soon become convinced that these Galileans had no intention of desisting as ordered. So the high priest issued a warrant, and the soldiers arrested all of the apostles and put them in the common prison. He fully intended to bring them before the Sanhedrin the next day and stop this revolutionary movement once for all.

But the next day, when the Sanhedrin convened and summoned the prisoners, the disquieting news came that, although the keepers were still posted and the doors were still locked—the prisoners were gone! At that moment another messenger arrived to say that these men were back at the temple, teaching.

During the night an angel had released them: had told them to return to the temple and not to be afraid.

They were promptly arrested a second time. This time the soldiers dragged them with ungentle hands directly before the Sanhedrin.

"You continue to disobey our commands to stop preaching this Jesus!" thundered the high priest. "It would seem that you intend bringing this Man's blood on our heads!" Ananias pounded the table before him. "We will not be put on trial by the Jerusalem rabble!" he raged.

Unflinching, Peter answered the charge for the group. "You claim to serve God. By your own vows you are bound to obey God even when your obedience places you in jeopardy before men. Now we, too, subscribe to this principle, and it

is because we would rather obey God than men that we have disobeyed you. It is the Christ, both living and glorified, whom we serve. We owe allegiance to none other!"

That day might well have been their last, except for the intervention of a senior member of the Sanhedrin, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, one of the most distinguished scholars of the day. Gamaliel did not share his colleagues' zeal against these men. And now he arose to interject a word of caution.

"Brethren," he ventured thoughtfully, "it may not be beyond the realm of possibility that we are wrong about this movement. Whether it is or it is not of God, I do not venture to decide. But I wish to make the point that if this movement is of divine origin, and we oppose it, we shall find ourselves in the unenviable position of having opposed the Almighty! And I, for one, do not relish the possibility of being charged with that."

The Pharisee, by now, had the full attention of the Sanhedrin. They were spiritually blind and phenomenally hardheaded, but they still managed to pull together brief scraps of religious integrity at times, for not many of them would willfully shake a fist in the face of the Almighty—provided they knew it *was* the Almighty.

"Now I suggest the following," continued Gamaliel. "Leave these men alone. This is not the first time that revolutionary movements have been launched in our land. Every time, man-made movements have been crushed or have withered. Now if this Way is of human origin it will fare no better than the other revolts and, sooner or later, will die out. But if it is the work of God, then nothing—and certainly not we—can stop it. In either event, then, it would seem to be the better part of wisdom to let it alone."

Gamaliel, of course, was right, and even the most hard-

headed of his colleagues could see his wisdom. Accordingly, the Sanhedrin decided to let the men go. But first they had them whipped: a last, malevolent gesture of spite. To have the final word in the matter, Ananias repeated his earlier warning: "You are to stop teaching this nonsense!"

As soon as they were released, the apostles took up their ministry where it had been left off, exhilarated by a new experience, that of having actually suffered for Christ's sake. The high priest's threat added a new impetus to their work as privately in homes, and publicly in the temple, they daily testified and taught.

And the Church grew rapidly.

It may surprise you, Theophilus, to hear that, within this first society of the Way, internal friction occurred. You might have expected that any fellowship united and energized by the Presence would necessarily be innocent of petty jealousies and disharmonies. But we do not cease being human when we are spiritually reborn. Neither do our new spiritual natures come to us fully matured.

By that Power greater than ourselves, a new life begins for souls long subject to unworthy motives and impure passions. But this new life begins young and immature: struggling for existence and with much to learn. The seed has germinated, but it will be a long while before the plant is mature!

Generally, to be sure, the Church's affairs are conducted in a spirit of unanimity. And there alone you have enough evidence that we have received a new Spirit. Moreover, even when occasionally we find ourselves temporarily out of accord in some minor respect, we find some way to restore harmony and preserve the unity of the Church. For our bond is a bond of peace. I can think of an early example

of what I mean in the question that arose over the distribution of charities, which led to the election of the Church's first officers.

It had not taken long for the benevolent program of the Church to reach considerable proportions. With a rather large number of believers being helped out of the central treasury, the administration of charity funds soon became a complicated business. Except for the fact that the apostles themselves were administering the program, criticism might have been heard sooner. Even so, rumors began to circulate that some were receiving more than others. Believers among a group of Greek proselytes were heard to say that the needy widows of their own foreign extraction were not as well provided for as the native Jews. And a situation was set up which might easily have caused ill feeling among men who were brothers in Christ.

But with characteristic good judgment the problem was solved. At the suggestion of the apostles, the Church elected its first officers. Seven deacons were chosen and ordained to administer the Church's funds. They were consecrated men, nearly all elected from the group in which the complaints had originated! Two, Stephen and Philip, soon figured prominently in the Program itself.

Easily the most conspicuous of the seven deacons was Stephen. Completely possessed by the Presence, he was intensely devout and utterly unafraid. His native gifts, coupled with his Greek background, made him especially successful among Jewish proselytes of Gentile—particularly Greek—background. He was one of the few besides the apostles whose total commitment had brought the power to work miracles.

So prominent and earnest a man could hardly have avoided

arousing the hostility of the Way's enemies. Stephen's career bore brilliant testimony to his faith, but it soon ended—in martyrdom, the first among the disciples. And no finer example of meekness, of consecration, and of fearlessness has been seen in the Church.

Unable to withstand him in open debate and afraid of his influence over the people, Stephen's enemies hired men to testify that he had taught seditious doctrines. They brought him before the Sanhedrin on a trumped-up charge of blasphemy.

In the trial, the Libertines and Cyrenians and others paraded a stream of uncouth fellows who swore that Stephen advocated the overthrow of the temple and of the law. Yet all the while the man himself stood, a silent, striking contrast to the picture painted by his prosecutors. (Later some who had witnessed the trial were heard to say that his face, that day, appeared like the face of an angel!)

When all the witnesses against him had finished, the high priest turned to Stephen. "What is your defense against these charges?" he demanded.

Stephen denied nothing—not even the infamous lies that had been told against him. Instead, he used his opportunity before the Sanhedrin to deliver a solemn, convincing warning. He left his judges with the uneasy feeling that they were on trial, not he. Beginning with the earliest history of the proud Jewish nation, he outlined, step by step, the plan of God that had culminated in the Incarnation. "The temple of God is in our midst," he emphasized, "but God is not confined to buildings erected by men's hands. He is a Spirit, and we who desire to worship Him must do so in Spirit and in Truth, or not at all," Stephen argued with his historical sketch.

But he never finished it. Suddenly overcome with emotion

and burning with an inner fire, Stephen interrupted his train of thought with an explosive accusal his hearers never forgot.

"You stiffnecked, pagan-hearted people!" he cried. "No true prophet of God has yet escaped persecution at the hands of people like you. Those who announced the coming of the Messiah died at the hands of false religionists: your ancestors. Now you follow in their footsteps, having killed the Son of God Himself and now willing, if you could, to stamp out His memory. Being the custodians of the holy heritage of our people, you have led the nation in desecrating it!"

All at once, Stephen broke off his tongue-lashing and raised his head heavenward. A look of exaltation transfigured his countenance. An expression of unspeakable joy lighted his face. "I see Heaven open!" he cried. "I see my Lord Jesus Christ at the right hand of God!"

That was more than the Sanhedrin could stand. In a body, they rose from their seats and made for him. In uncontrollable fury, they seized Stephen and rushed him from the hall; they carried him bodily through the streets, out of the city, and into the open countryside. There they stoned him. But as the heavy rocks beat upon his body and consciousness began to fade, his clear, steady voice could be heard amid the din of their cries:

"Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. O Lord, charge not this sin against their account!" This he prayed as he fell asleep.

On the fringe of the crowd stoning Stephen stood a young Pharisee: a man slight of build, short of stature, with piercing eyes. On his face was a look of satisfaction, though he had not taken part in the stone-throwing. He fully agreed with the verdict of the Sanhedrin and wholly approved the sentence. At his feet lay a pile of garments which he had

agreed to watch for several who were taking part in the execution.

This young Pharisee was Saul. Although a Jew, he was also a Roman citizen, having been born in the city of Tarsus in Cilicia. Educated at the feet of Gamaliel, Saul gave great promise of prominence in ecclesiastical circles.

After the death of Stephen, this young Doctor threw himself zealously into the task of wiping out the Church. More than anyone else, he instigated the intense persecution which followed, and which swept disciples by the score into prison. Personally stalking the city streets with members of the temple guard and fawning informers at his side, Saul made many arrests, dragging both men and women off to the dungeons.

Providentially, however, the drive against the Church materially helped the spreading of the Gospel. Before, the disciples had been content to limit their work to Jerusalem and its environs, having forgotten their world-wide commission. But now hundreds were leaving the capital; and, with fugitives going out to all parts of the Roman empire, the Gospel began to reach far-away places. The Church soon flourished in the north as far as Damascus in Syria. And in another city much farther to the north, called Antioch, it made great progress. The Church later grew so strong in Antioch that the city became the center of its world-wide activities.

In Antioch, for the first time anywhere, the disciples were called Christians.

The apostles, however, stayed on in Jerusalem.

Among those who left the city at this time was another of the first seven deacons: Philip. He selected for his field of labor the city of Samaria, and by doing so drove the opening

wedge into the wall which until this time had limited the Gospel to Jews only. The Samaritans were Jews, but outcast Jews of corrupted ancestry. Their history dated from the days of the great captivity, when the few Hebrews who remained in Israel had entered into mixed marriages with the Assyrian conquerors.

Philip's ministry, accompanied by miracles, made a profound impression upon the Samaritans. Less blinded by pride or national prejudice, they heard the Good News of Power gladly. Large crowds accepted baptism. Among the converts were several prominent persons, including a man named Simon who enjoyed a wide reputation as a sorcerer or magician. Simon was most impressed with the healing miracles performed by Philip.

When the news got back to the apostles at Jerusalem that Samaria was receiving the Gospel, some were surprised. Despite the clarity of their great commission, they were not yet convinced that Gentiles should be invited into the Church. Strictly speaking, though, Samaritans were not Gentiles. So, more to confirm the report than to criticize, the apostles sent Peter and John to Samaria.

Peter and John found Philip with a large following. But somehow, unaccountably, they found that the usual symptoms of change were missing from the experiences related by the new converts. Evidence of Power, or that anything had occurred to signify the Presence was missing. For some reason, Philip's preaching had been lifeless. Somehow he had managed to convey the skeletal outline of the Message, without stirring anything up. In some way he had preached Christianity, but had left out the Lord Himself. Perhaps he, too, had hesitated a little in expecting an out-

pouring upon Samaritans of the same Power that had been given to Jews.

But the message of the Gospel is only the offer of Power. And Peter and John knew that Philip's work in Samaria would be valueless if there was no evidence of internal possession by the Presence. Calling the believers together, Peter explained the very fine distinction between what they had and what they must have. Then he and John prayed for them. And as they stretched out their hands in intercession, the Spirit of the living God fell on them.

The wall of separation between Jew and Gentile was rapidly crumbling. Peter and John returned from Samaria to Jerusalem, preaching in every village along the way, both Samaritan and Hebrew.

Meanwhile Philip had felt a distinct call to go south toward Gaza, near the coast. Uncomprehending but obedient to the inner urge, the evangelist left Samaria. A day or so later, he was trudging the hot, dusty road between Jerusalem and Gaza.

As he walked along a splendidly caparisoned team and chariot, driven by a gigantic black slave, overtook him. The sole passenger was a richly dressed nobleman—by the color of his skin, plainly of Ethiopia. He was reading, and, as the walking horses drew abreast, Philip noticed that it was a scroll of Scripture. Philip hailed the chariot. The Ethiopian signaled the driver to stop, and Philip approached the vehicle.

"Do you understand what you are reading?" he asked suggestively.

"No! How can I, without guidance? Are you familiar with the Scriptures?" frankly returned the nobleman.

"I may be able to help you."

"Then ride with me."

Philip, riding on with him, explained the glorious meaning of the words of Isaiah that he had been reading: "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before its shearers, so He opened not His mouth."

Beginning with these words, Philip told about the One who had come to earth; who had suffered and died to open great doors of divine mercy; who had risen from the dead and returned to His Father; who was certain to return in judgment. He told the Good News: that the Power of God was available to meet the deepest need of the hungriest man. He described the Program and the enthusiasm with which it was received; the effects they already had seen of the Presence at work.

As they rode along, they passed a small, desert spring. "See," interrupted the Ethiopian, "here is water. May I, too, be baptized?"

"If you believe," replied Philip.

At his command, the chariot stood still. The two men walked to the spring. There, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the man of Ethiopia was baptized, receiving the same inner gifts that had been given to the others. As they turned to walk back to the chariot, all at once Philip vanished, leaving his companion alone.

Philip was next heard from in Azotus, from which he went to Caesarea. There he married and settled down to a permanent ministry.

The Gospel had been delivered to Samaritans and to Ethiopia.

Meanwhile, Saul the Pharisee, dissatisfied with the progress of the drive to stamp out the Way, determined to track down as many as possible of the disciples who had escaped

Jerusalem. With the full backing of the Sanhedrin, he organized a party and set out for Damascus, far to the north, bearing a commission from the high priest. He intended to bring back to Jerusalem as many of the Way as he could find for trial and punishment.

The journey was a long one. During the first part of it nothing eventful happened. But the last day was one which Saul would never forget. For at noon, as he and his party plodded along the road almost in sight of the city, a blazing shaft of light suddenly flashed from the sky to strike him full in the face. Struck blind, Saul fell from his mount to the hard ground. Before any of his companions could reach his side, a tremendous Voice spoke to the fallen man:

"Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

Trembling and astonished, Saul looked up with unseeing eyes. He didn't doubt that he heard the voice of his God. But the Voice had accused him of persecution. Whom had he persecuted? "Who are you, Lord?" he quavered.

"I am Jesus, of Nazareth, whom you have been persecuting," replied the Voice. Saul's companions stood petrified. They could see no one, but they heard a sound like thunder. "You do damage only to yourself when you kick sharp goads!" continued the Lord.

Now Saul was a religious man. He had served his God conscientiously, and even now he was acting—so he thought—in the best interests of his Lord. "Tell me what you want me to do," he whispered.

"Arise!" the Lord commanded. "Go into Damascus, and there you will be told."

The Pharisee could see nothing. Struggling to his feet, he felt for his mount. The spell broken, his companions quickly hurried to his side and helped him up. To their questions Saul

answered not a word. "I must go into the city," was all that he would say.

A thoroughly broken man made his groping way to the lodging house of one Judas. There, for three days, he remained in chastened seclusion, refusing to leave his room, alone with his thoughts. What lay in store for him? What would he be told, and by whom? Dimly he began to remember what he had heard about the Way, and painfully, there in the darkness, he pieced it together while he waited.

Stephen had not lied!

While the future apostle to the Gentiles waited in agonized suspense, a resident of Damascus named Ananias, a disciple, was called to play a part in the significant drama. In a dream he saw the Lord and heard Him speaking:

"Ananias, go to the house of Judas on the street that is called Straight. There you will find a man named Saul. He is praying. He has been told, in a vision, that you will come to restore his sight: for he has been blinded."

The name struck Ananias with a familiar ring. Wondering, he murmured: "I have heard of this man, Lord. He has done much evil to the Christians in Jerusalem. And we already have been told that he was on his way to Damascus to arrest all who follow the Way here!"

Gently the Lord replied: "Go, without fear. For this man is my chosen instrument to testify of me before Gentiles and Jews and Kings!"

When Ananias awoke, he obediently made his way to the house of Judas. Entering Saul's room, he faced the sightless figure for a moment wordlessly. Then he put his hands on the Pharisee's shoulders. "Brother Saul," he said, "the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road has sent me to

you that your sight may be restored and that you may receive the Power of God!"

Instantly, as though scales had fallen from his eyes, Saul's vision came back, and he arose and was baptized.

For several months, Saul remained with the disciples in Damascus. Eagerly he drank in all they could tell him about the Way and about those last days of the Lord's life on earth. Saul's background was steeped in the law. A brilliant scholar, he had at his finger tips all the prophetic utterances of the sacred Scriptures relevant to the Messiah; and it thrilled him to see how they fitted in with all that he was told. He did not remain long satisfied to be idle. After he had located the local synagogue he spent much of his time there, arguing with the religious authorities and teaching to all who would listen the Way he had found. His teaching became so effective that, inevitably, the tables were turned against him. He who had been a persecutor found himself plotted against. And when news came that the Jews were perfecting their plans to seize him without warning, Saul left Damascus. Because his erstwhile friends were guarding the gates, he escaped with the aid of the disciples, lowered over the city wall in a basket at night!

Traveling continuously, Saul arrived in Jerusalem several days later. He tried to locate the disciples, but all his inquiries were met with evasive answers and vacant stares. When he sought out known Christians to tell his story, they would not listen or else pretended they didn't know what he was talking about. They were afraid of him.

After several fruitless days, he encountered an old acquaintance who was to become an intimate friend and colleague. This man, Barnabas, a converted Levite who had been associated with him in the administration of temple

affairs, listened to his story and was convinced by his marvelous experience on the road to Damascus, his conversion and baptism, his preaching and persecution.

So Barnabas presented Saul to the apostles, and on Barnabas' word he was received as a brother.

He could not stay long in Jerusalem, either. His boldness in proclaiming the Gospel quickly destroyed whatever immunity he may have had on account of his position as a Doctor, and his former colleagues began to plan how they could get rid of him. Moreover, one day as he prayed in the temple, he received his commission. The Lord told him to leave Jerusalem, for it was to the Gentiles that he would go.

Aided in his escape from the city by the disciples, Saul made his way to Tarsus, his birthplace, in the province of Cilicia, to the northwest of Palestine.

But the Church was not yet ready for an all-out program among Gentile people. Despite the Lord's command, they did not realize that the Kingdom of God must include all nations equally. The disciples were going to all parts of the world, but they still limited their invitation to Jews and Jewish proselytes. A convincing demonstration was needed to recast their thinking. The demonstration began with a curious vision.

Simon Peter had been visiting in the coastal city of Joppa to the west of Jerusalem. God had gratifyingly blessed the evangelistic work he had been doing throughout that part of Judea. The Presence was demonstrably with him: in Lydda he had healed a man paralyzed eight years before, and in Joppa itself he had raised a woman named Dorcas from the very dead.

Now, one day about noon, as Peter prayed on the rooftop of the house where he was staying, he fell into a trance. In

his vision he saw the sky open and a great sheet come down, fastened at the four corners. Inside the sheet were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds, all of them alike in one respect: they were of the sort labeled Unclean by the law. And as the apostle stared a Voice came to him: "Arise, Peter; kill and eat!"

Horried to be asked so to violate the law, Peter replied, "No, Lord, I have never eaten anything common or unclean!"

But to his amazement the Voice rebuked him: "What God has cleansed is not for you to call common or unclean!"

Three times the scene repeated itself, each time with the same dialogue. Then the Voice said: "Three men now stand at the door. They will ask you to accompany them. Go with them. I sent them for you."

And Peter awoke.

Sure enough, a loud rapping came at the door. Two well dressed slaves and a Roman soldier were asking if one Simon Peter lived at this address. Cordial if a little curious, the apostle asked the purpose of their visit.

"Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian band in Caesarea, was told in a dream to send for you; to hear a message that you have for him."

Here was something unexpected. Apparently the Lord intended that this Gentile, Cornelius, should hear the Gospel. Peter already had his own orders to go with these men. But if he must visit a Gentile it would be well to have witnesses. So, when he left Joppa the next day, the apostle took six disciples with him.

Cornelius the centurion lived in a sumptuous villa at the heart of Caesarea. From the messengers Peter had learned much about this man. Apparently he was generous and

devout and was held in high regard by Jews as well as his own people. But Peter was unprepared for the welcome he received. As he entered the principal room of the house, a large number of people rose to greet him. From one corner, a Roman officer in white toga stepped forward, hesitated, then dropped to his knees, bowing to the floor.

Peter quickly reached down and lifted him up. "Stand on your feet!" he commanded. "I, too, am only a man!" He expected to proceed cautiously. The very fact that he had entered this man's house constituted a breach of propriety. But now he saw clearly the meaning of his strange vision. God had shown him that he had no right to consider any man common or unclean.

"Why did you send for me?" he asked.

"Four days ago, when I was at prayer, a man dressed in bright clothing suddenly appeared before me," recounted the centurion. 'Your prayers have been heard,' he said, 'and your good deeds held in remembrance before God. Now send to Joppa for one Simon Peter who is staying with Simon the tanner. When he comes, he will have a message for you.' The rest, you know. I sent for you immediately.

"These are my close friends. Together we await your message!"

Then Peter realized that all along he had known that the Gospel could not be for Jews only. It was not in keeping with the character of the message that one race should be considered superior to another: this message of salvation for helpless and unworthy people!

Finding a place to sit down, Peter launched into the story of Him who came, who died, who rose again and was glorified. "This One," he declared as he reached the climax of his message, "God has ordained to be the judge of the

quick and the dead at that Resurrection we all expect. Through His name, all that believe in Him shall receive forgiveness of sins!"

Before Peter finished speaking, of a sudden the Power fell on the group just as it first had come on the band in the upper room at Jerusalem. The apostle turned to find his six companions gaping with astonishment. Of them he demanded: "Is there any reason why these Gentiles, upon whom God has seen fit to send the Spirit, should not be baptized?"

And they were baptized.

Not long afterward, the Church at Jerusalem heard that Gentiles had been invited to receive the Gospel and had been baptized. And they summoned Peter to explain. Supported by the testimony of the six companions who had been with him, Peter soon convinced the elders that the Lord indeed intended the Church to include Gentiles on a basis equal with Jews. The tradition of centuries had been effectively shattered!

And the door had swung open to the whole world. From this moment on, the story of the Church would become largely an account of Gentile conversions. More and more, the Gospel would be refused by the Jews until conversions almost ceased among those who originally had been called the people of God. The Kingdom had become universal!

And now Saul, who from this point on would be known as Paul, began his great work as the apostle to the Gentiles. News came to Jerusalem that the Program was spreading among Greeks in Antioch, and the apostles sent Barnabas to see if it were so. When Barnabas arrived in Antioch, and saw that the beginning of a flourishing Church already existed among those philosophy-minded Hellenists, he im-

mediately thought of the scholar, Paul, then in Tarsus. Making the long journey himself rather than risking a message, he convinced the Pharisee that a great opportunity existed in Antioch; and he brought him back there.

Whereupon, for more than a year, Barnabas and Paul labored together in Antioch.

Then, one day, while the Church was at prayer, another call came for them. Larger fields lay ahead. Teeming cities waited to hear. First with Barnabas, later with Silas, then with others, the man called Paul, the only disciple in addition to the twelve to be recognized as an apostle, went out to become the Lord's instrument to convert the world.

In some places, his Gospel would be well received and strong churches would be organized. In others, it would be refused, and would establish its Power only after great difficulties had been overcome. Everywhere it would meet opposition, and sometimes outright persecution. But everywhere it would be heard!

For Paul many triumphs and many disappointments lay ahead. There would be imprisonments, and beatings and stonings. He would cover thousands of miles and enter most of the world's great centers of population. He would establish churches and nourish them: teaching, exhorting, encouraging, and disciplining. And at the end of the road waited the queen of the world: proud Rome, a city destined to become captive to this little man who would enter her walls, a prisoner.

And so the Gospel finally came to you, Theophilus. These things happened in order that you and millions of others might hear and believe the Message. I have told you of the Way from the very first visitation which led to the Event.

You have asked me about Paul. I have told you how he has become the most conspicuous among us.

God indeed has used this little man who brought you the Gospel in a special way: not only to establish His Church, but to organize and convey, for our own generation and also for all who follow us, the great ideas and ideals implied in the Way. He has credentials that speak of a special inspiration, and it was not in vain that you heard him and believed.

Paul's life, the commission he received, the way it was given to him, the success that has accompanied his ministry, the certain evidence of his authority—all these things testify to the God above him who has spoken through his mouth and his pen in those manuals of faith we cherish in the Church today.

This, then, is the story behind our religion: the faith you profess, Theophilus, and in which you have been instructed.

May it establish your heart.

Luke